# It Was A Lover and His Lass

Mrs Oliphant

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VOL. II.

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BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF

"MRS. MARGARET MAITLAND," "AGNES,"
"ADAM GRAEME OF MOSSGRAY,"
ETC., ETC.

Truly, young gentlemen . . . there was no great matter in the ditty.
*As You Like It.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1883.

# IT WAS A LOVER AND HIS LASS.

## CHAPTER I.

GENERAL MURRAY, the only son of Sir Patrick, had, like his father before him, married at a very early age, so that his eldest daughter was not more than twenty-two years younger than himself, and he was, when he married for the second time a wife younger than Margaret, a man but little over forty, in the prime of his life and strength, as handsome as he had ever been, and attractive enough to take any girl's fancy. The second wife had been poor, but she had been noble, and the entail of the old hereditary estate, upon which stood at once the old Castle and the new unfinished palace, was broken in order that it might

be secured to the children of Lady Lilias, whether sons or daughters. Who could doubt that so young and blooming a bride, out of a well-conditioned family, would bring both in abundant measure to the old house? Margaret and Jean, the two daughters of the first marriage, were left in the south country in possession of their mother's little estate when their father began life for the second time. They felt themselves a little injured, shut out of their natural rights, as was natural, and held themselves aloof from the new *ménage*, which was established joyously in the old Castle with every augury of happiness. But when, no more than a year after, the blooming young wife was carried to the churchyard, and a second poor little Lilias left in her stead, the two sisters flew, with many a compunction and self-reproach, to the infant's cradle. Margaret especially, who, though she was young, was already disposed to believe that everything went wrong when she was absent, reproached herself bitterly for not being on the spot to watch over her father's wife. It would not have happened had she been there, she felt convinced, and this perfectly visionary self-blame no doubt helped to give a certain bias

to her already peculiar character. 'I must do my best for the daughter. I did not do it for the mother,' she acquired a habit of saying when any other career was suggested to her. She did not feel quite sure that she was not her father's elder sister, so confusing were their relations. He was broken down with grief and disappointment, and she took charge of him at once, and of his home. It would perhaps be going too far to say that this was the reason why she did not marry. Had any great love arisen in her heart, no doubt Margaret would, like other people, have considered it her duty to obey its dictates; but, when suitors to whom she was indifferent came, Miss Murray metaphorically pushed them aside out of her path, with a curt intimation that she had no time to think of such nonsense. Miss Jean, who was of a sentimental turn, had not so easily escaped the common dangers of youth, but she did so in a more romantic way, poor lady, by loving, unfortunately, a young hero who had not a penny, and who died in an obscure Indian battle when she was little more than twenty. This was shortly after the time when the infant Lilias was thrown upon her sisters' hands, and it was

enough to determine the celibacy of the gentle young woman, who was indeed an old maid born: an old maid more tender and indulgent than any mother, an old maid who is still young, and can enter into the troubles of childhood and youth not only by recollection of her own, but in the sense of actual understanding and fellowship as one who had herself never thrown quite behind her the state of youth or even childhood. The more perfectly developed are apt to smile at this arrested being, but there is nothing in the world more delightful, tender, and sweet.

Between these two, Lilias' childhood had been passed. Her father was less at home than ever after this destruction of his hopes. He held some military appointments, and saw a good deal of service. In the intervals, when he returned to Scotland, his young daughter adored and made a playmate of him, his elder daughter kept him in order. Never was a man taken better care of; when the breach with Sir Patrick happened, the ladies stood by him with all the determined partizanship of women. He was living with them then on their little estate in the south, in the little feminine house called Gowanbrae, which had been their mother's, and where they

had taken the baby after her mother's death. So long as they had that independent house, which they preferred, what was the Castle of Murkley to them? When Sir Patrick died, they 'came north,' as they expressed it, with the general, to show Lilias her home, and to acquaint her at first hand with those glories of the family which they pretended to scorn, but were in reality very proud of.

'All that money might have been in your pocket if your grandfather had been a man of sense,' Miss Margaret said, pointing to the bleached walls of the unfinished palace.

But Jean and Lilias had both a wondering awe and admiration for folly which was so magnificent. Lilias was sixteen when she saw it first. She uttered a great cry of admiration and delight.

'I should like to save up every penny and finish it and live in it,' she cried.

Her father shook his handsome white head: but Miss Margaret 'had no patience with such nonsense,' as she said.

'Live in it!—what income do you think you would require to live in it? The Queen has not so grand a house,' said the elder sister, with the

pride that aped indignation, 'except perhaps Windsor Castle and the palace in London. Taymouth is not much bigger. You would want fifty thousand a year at the very least penny. All we have for the whole family on both sides would not so much as furnish it.'

'Unless,' said the general, with a laugh, 'you make a great match, my little Lily, and get your duke to do it for you—or perhaps a Glasgow man would do?'

'A child of *our* bringing up would not be likely to demean herself so far, I hope,' said Miss Margaret, with emphasis.

'A Glasgow man!' cried Miss Jean, with a quaver of horror. 'No, no, Lilias will never come down to that.'

The General liked to gibe at his daughters; perhaps, though they were his daughters, he was not without some of that contempt for them which men of all ages feel towards unmarried women.

'I have seen some fine fellows at Glasgow,' he said, 'and rolling in money. I will look out for one, and bring him for your inspection, Lilias. But, Meg and Jean, you must not prejudice my candidate—you must let the child choose.'

'Do, papa—it will be fun!' cried Lilias.

Miss Margaret had a high idea of her father's rights. She would not make any direct protest, as Jean was anxious to do, but she took her little sister aside when they returned home.

'My dear,' she said, 'gentlemen say many things that women-folk do not agree in, and papa is fond of his joke. You must not suppose that is all in earnest, that way he has of talking.'

Lilias was 'as quick as a needle,' her sisters said. She made a momentary pause, and then said, with a laugh,

'About the Glasgow man?'

'About any man,' cried Miss Margaret. 'My darling, gentlemen will be gentlemen, even when they are your father. They think those sort of pleasantries just innocent, but they are not pretty for a girl; you must remember that. Jean and I have never let you hear anything of the kind. A girl, above all things, Lilias, must be unspotted from the world.'

'Unspotted from the world!' the girl repeated, with a half-startled look at her sister; and then she added, with a little emotion, 'Oh, what bonnie words, Margaret!'

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The General thought his lily perfect, whatever she pleased to do, and the girl knew this very well, and had a little disdain for his judgment, though she adored himself. She had thus grown already into an independent creature, with a judgment of her own, bringing them all secretly to the bar, and forming her opinion in a way which bewildered these elder people who had brought her up. She was not an echo of any one of them, as at her age she might have been expected to be. She was all herself, and took nothing now for granted. To be sure, it was chiefly Margaret who noticed this. The General was not given to analysis of character, and thought his child the perfection of everything a girl ought to be, and Miss Jean was much of the same frame of mind, though a breath of anxiety would ruffle her soul from time to time. The household on the whole was unanimous enough in the worship of Lilias. As for their father, he was something of a trouble to the ladies. The sense that he was a Gentleman, a being she understood but imperfectly, gave Miss Jean a certain embarrassment in his presence. She played all her music to him with a wondering doubt, which she never solved, as to whether he liked it, or if

it was a bore to him, and felt that papa was far younger than herself, and that there was no telling with so handsome a man what was the next step he might take. Margaret felt him with still more force to be her junior, and kept his house much as she might have done for a widowed nephew—that was the kind of relationship which would have been natural between them. They sometimes speculated between themselves whether there was any chance that he might marry again. He was only sixty, very young-looking, in reality very young; as active as he had ever been, a man who could ride all day, and, if need were, dance all night as if he had been twenty. 'I never see the like of him wherever I go,' Miss Margaret said. But then he had nothing to settle, he was himself but a life-renter in Murkley, and the fortune that had always been expected from old Sir Patrick had gone to the dogs—or, at least, to a stranger.

The subject of these questions solved them all very summarily one winter evening by dying. He had not been ill. He had a slight cold—that, and nothing more. He had taken a hot drink to please Margaret, and had put his feet in hot water when he went to rest. But

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'Live in it!—what income do you think you would require to live in it? The Queen has not so grand a house,' said the elder sister, with the

ful magnificence, holding a maiden court. And Lilias would dream of vast sums coming into her hands, of treasures found in some old chest or secret nook in the old house, of far-off, unknown cousins, who would send fabulous sums from afar to restore Murkley to its greatness. It is so easy to imagine benefactors of this kind —a novel-writer can invent them without giving himself or herself the least trouble, much more the imagination of a girl. Lilias was as indifferent to wealth as it was possible to be. A single gold piece all her own, to do what she pleased with, especially if she might spend it without putting down the items of her expenditure in a note-book, was wealth to the young creature: but she knew just so much as to know that it would require what she vaguely called, following the phraseology of her sister, 'thousands' to complete the great house which her grandfather had left unfinished. If it ever should happen that she could do that! In the long summer evenings, especially when her sisters had gone out, and she was left alone, she would dream out whole histories of how the money might be supplied. What romances these would have made had she written them down! She

would figure forth to herself a stranger arriving suddenly some evening in the gloaming—it was always in the gloaming, in the uncertainty of light which suits women—not a handsome or interesting stranger, not the tall hero, with dark eyes and curling hair, who, Lilias felt assured, was the only man she would ever 'care for,' but a shabby stranger, a man one would never look twice at, with all the appearance of a nobody. Margaret and Jean were never rude to anyone: they would receive him very politely, and request him to come in to the fire, if it was winter—and somehow it was always winter in these imaginations. Then he would open his story to them, how he was a man who had been much indebted to 'the late Murkley,' or to old Sir Patrick: or who was a cousin-german of the old baronet, though perhaps the ladies had never heard of him; how he had hoped and struggled to pay his debt, but had never been able (this was to try them, and Lilias felt sure all along that she for one would know better). But Margaret and Jean would believe the story fully. They would be very sorry for him; they would try immediately to think what they could do for him. If he professed to be a

relation, they would trace out his claim and satisfy themselves, and then they would put all their resources at his disposal.

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Lilias pictured herself as sitting silent, seeing the *dessous des cartes*, and convinced in her own mind that all the time this shabby old fellow was a millionaire, like so many people who have figured in old plays and novels, and, after a few scenes of this description, there would come a crisis, and he would throw off his disguise, and produce a pocket-book with

'thousands' in it, and tell them that for all his life it had been his ambition to see New Murkley finished, and the family raised to its old grandeur. 'I have neither kith nor kin but yourselves,' the old gentleman always said, 'and all I have shall be yours; only be as kind to me now I am rich as you were when I was poor.'

It was not quite so easy to manage this scene as the first one; for Lilias could not quite assure herself that Margaret's displeasure at being taken in might not overbalance the satisfaction of receiving so unexpected an advantage. But it ended by her own intervention and a vague tableau of happiness and union. How often she went over this story! She became, in imagination, much attached to this old cousin. She seemed to know him better than anyone about her. She would even make investigations into his life abroad, and get him to tell her stories of the things that had happened to him. Sometimes he would have lost his wife and an only child; sometimes he would be an old bachelor, always faithful to the memory of some grand-aunt whose portrait was in the library. It was a lady of the time of Queen Anne whom Lilias

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would stop in; or even there might be boxes of treasure found in the old cellars, or buried in tho ghost's walk. Who can ever tell what may happen? At seventeen everything is possible.

## CHAPTER II.

HER sisters were as great visionaries in the concerns of Lilias as she was herself, but in a different way. They had no hope of any old cousin coming in from Australia or India with a pocket-book in which there should be 'thousands.' Margaret and Jean knew all the possible cousins of the family, and were aware that there was no one who could be expected to appear in this accidental way. But for all that they too had their dreams. So far as themselves were concerned, they had for a long time given up that exercise. It is doubtful, indeed, whether Margaret ever had indulged in it, and Jean's visions had come to an end very sadly, as has been said. But the new castle of Murkley had taken hold of their imaginations as of their little sister's. It was their grandfather's folly which they had condemned all this time,

but they were but women when all is said, and the sight of it had an effect upon their fancy which contradicted reason. Nothing could be more absurd, or even wicked, than to weight an old Scotch, almost Highland, estate in that ridiculous way, even if the money of the family had not been separated from it, which was the climax of all. But at the same time, if that grand house, that palace, could ever have been inhabited, what glory to the race, what illustration to the name of Murray! Margaret, to whom her young sister was as the apple of her eye, beheld in imagination Lilias the queen of that noble and beautiful place, sweeping through the fine suites of rooms, entertaining all the great people. To see anything so young, and slight, and ethereal the mistress of all this would be so pretty, so touching, would appeal to all hearts. Margaret was as fond of picturing this to herself as Lilias was of the aged cousin from Australia. Her fancy was captivated by it: but how to make it possible? There was not money enough in the family to furnish those fine rooms, and, if they were furnished, how were they to be lived in? She counted over on her fingers the number of servants it would require to keep them in order. As high

as a groom of the chambers, and as low as the scullery maids, Margaret went. She smiled at herself, you may be sure, a hundred times when she caught herself at it. But, notwithstanding, the very next morning when she was outwardly occupied with her housekeeping, and her mind, therefore, it might be supposed, too busy to heed what her fancy was doing, lo! she would be at it again. A groom of the chambers would be necessary; there would be footmen, so many; and, as for housemaids, a regiment would be necessary, for Lilias no doubt would insist upon filling the rooms with nick-nacks which take so long to dust. Margaret pretended to care nothing for nick-nacks herself, but she furnished those great noble rooms in her imagination with everything that befitted them, and never counted the cost. When you have nothing at all to do this with, it is easier than when you have almost enough to do it. In one case the imagination may have its swing, in the other it must be sternly repressed. She saw in her mind's eye the great façade of that palace, no longer windowless, staring blankly into the daylight and night, but lighted up in every chamber, shining through the woods, and the

rooms all full of fine company, and little Lilias the mistress of all. That last particular was a constant delight. She laughed to herself at the thought with the tender ridicule of a great longing. That little thing! It was just nonsense, but how sweet to think of!—and things as unlikely have happened, she said to herself. There was one way still in which miracles happened every day. It was the way which she had forbidden her little sister to look, which she had been so displeased and provoked with her father for suggesting. Certainly Lilias must never be allowed to think of it; Lilias must be kept unspotted from the world. But Lilias' seniors, Lilias' guardians, there were things which might be permitted to them.

Is it necessary to say that what Miss Margaret thought of was a great marriage? Such a thing is always possible at eighteen. Not a Glasgow man, according to her father's profane suggestion. It was a proof the General had never thought of it seriously, or he never would have said that. Glasgow men at the most were last resources, things upon which a woman who had outstayed her time might fall back. But a young girl in the bloom and glory of her

youth, of an old family, with a little historical estate, General Sir George Murray's daughter —to be sure, nobody could be in earnest who put her within the reach of a Glasgow man. Margaret imagined the lover for her with a much more clear perception of what was needful than Lilias possessed. Lilias had never gone further than to imagine a handsome giant, six-foot-two at least, with wonderful dark eyes and crisp hair. But Margaret was far more circumstantial. She planned a paladin. She gave him every charm that the most fastidious could demand. It seemed to her better that he should not have a peerage; for then the race of Murray would be engulfed, and heard no more of. A commoner would do better, but then a commoner of pretensions, such as would make half the peerage look pale. She laid on fine qualities with a liberal hand; for it cost her nothing. While she was about it, she might as well make her young lover perfect. She even, though with a slight contempt of the addition, made him an amateur of music to please Jean. Why should any gift be left out? And he should come all unawares, and find Lilias blooming like a flower, and woo her—as heroes woo their

would figure forth to herself a stranger arriving suddenly some evening in the gloaming—it was always in the gloaming, in the uncertainty of light which suits women—not a handsome or interesting stranger, not the tall hero, with dark eyes and curling hair, who, Lilias felt assured, was the only man she would ever 'care for,' but a shabby stranger, a man one would never look twice at, with all the appearance of a nobody. Margaret and Jean were never rude to anyone: they would receive him very politely, and request him to come in to the fire, if it was winter—and somehow it was always winter in these imaginations. Then he would open his story to them, how he was a man who had been much indebted to 'the late Murkley,' or to old Sir Patrick: or who was a cousin-german of the old baronet, though perhaps the ladies had never heard of him; how he had hoped and struggled to pay his debt, but had never been able (this was to try them, and Lilias felt sure all along that she for one would know better). But Margaret and Jean would believe the story fully. They would be very sorry for him; they would try immediately to think what they could do for him. If he professed to be a

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any older or any wiser yourself, my dear. I know that well enough, and I like you, perhaps, all the better. But Lilias is not like us. She is Murray of Murkley. If it had been me at her age, my word but I would have made you all stand about! But it's better as it is. She will marry, which most likely I never would have done, for I'm perhaps too much of a man myself to be troubled with gentlemen. She'll marry and raise up the old house.'

To this Jean consented plaintively, yet with a little excitement.

'But who will she marry?' Jean asked; 'and, if she were married to-morrow, where are they to get the money to restore New Murkley? He would be for selling it, far more likely.'

Margaret had often been made to perceive before this that Jean, though she was not clever, by dint of approaching a new subject simply from a natural point of view, often threw unexpected light upon it. This was the case now. A burst or flood of illumination of the most disagreeable kind suddenly burst upon her with these words.

'Sell it!' she cried, with a kind of horror—'bless me! I never thought of that.'

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no sentiment. He must satisfy me before I will let her so much as think of him. No, I'm not a mercenary person; for myself or you I would never have thought twice. Had I been a marrying woman myself, I would just have followed the drum as soon as anything else, and kept my man on his pay.'

Jean did not say anything, but there came a little moisture into the corners of her eyes, and her hands clasped each other with that clasp which is eloquent, which tells of renunciation, yet of the sense of what might have been. And a sudden remorse overwhelmed her sister.

'I am just like a brute beast,' she cried, 'with no feeling in me. But Lilias, you will see, my dear, is different. The family depends upon her. She must marry, not for money—the Lord forbid!—but he must have plenty. I will insist upon that. I would not give her to a man that was nobody, or that was vulgar or beneath her, or that was old, or with any imperfection, not for all the gold that ever came out of the bowels of the earth. He must be a fine fellow in himself, or he shall not have Lilias; but he must have a good fortune too.'

Jean looked at her sister with a little shake of her head.

as a groom of the chambers, and as low as the scullery maids, Margaret went. She smiled at herself, you may be sure, a hundred times when she caught herself at it. But, notwithstanding, the very next morning when she was outwardly occupied with her housekeeping, and her mind, therefore, it might be supposed, too busy to heed what her fancy was doing, lo! she would be at it again. A groom of the chambers would be necessary; there would be footmen, so many; and, as for housemaids, a regiment would be necessary, for Lilias no doubt would insist upon filling the rooms with nick-nacks which take so long to dust. Margaret pretended to care nothing for nick-nacks herself, but she furnished those great noble rooms in her imagination with everything that befitted them, and never counted the cost. When you have nothing at all to do this with, it is easier than when you have almost enough to do it. In one case the imagination may have its swing, in the other it must be sternly repressed. She saw in her mind's eye the great façade of that palace, no longer windowless, staring blankly into the daylight and night, but lighted up in every chamber, shining through the woods, and the

would figure forth to herself a stranger arriving suddenly some evening in the gloaming—it was always in the gloaming, in the uncertainty of light which suits women—not a handsome or interesting stranger, not the tall hero, with dark eyes and curling hair, who, Lilias felt assured, was the only man she would ever 'care for,' but a shabby stranger, a man one would never look twice at, with all the appearance of a nobody. Margaret and Jean were never rude to anyone: they would receive him very politely, and request him to come in to the fire, if it was winter—and somehow it was always winter in these imaginations. Then he would open his story to them, how he was a man who had been much indebted to 'the late Murkley,' or to old Sir Patrick: or who was a cousin-german of the old baronet, though perhaps the ladies had never heard of him; how he had hoped and struggled to pay his debt, but had never been able (this was to try them, and Lilias felt sure all along that she for one would know better). But Margaret and Jean would believe the story fully. They would be very sorry for him; they would try immediately to think what they could do for him. If he professed to be a

relation, they would trace out his claim and satisfy themselves, and then they would put all their resources at his disposal.

Lilias delighted in making up the dialogues which would be appropriate to the occasion. She would picture to herself how Jean would clasp her hands, and cry, 'Bless me!' as the stranger piled up his agony; and how Margaret would say,

'Of course you will stay here till you hear of something better. We are not rich, unfortunately, because of divisions in the family, which you shall hear about further on, but for the moment that's neither here nor there. And we have little influence; for we have lived out of the world, having our young sister to bring up, and being fond of the country; but what can be done, we will do.'

Lilias pictured herself as sitting silent, seeing the *dessous des cartes*, and convinced in her own mind that all the time this shabby old fellow was a millionaire, like so many people who have figured in old plays and novels, and, after a few scenes of this description, there would come a crisis, and he would throw off his disguise, and produce a pocket-book with

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'thousands' in it, and tell them that for all his life it had been his ambition to see New Murkley finished, and the family raised to its old grandeur. 'I have neither kith nor kin but yourselves,' the old gentleman always said, 'and all I have shall be yours; only be as kind to me now I am rich as you were when I was poor.'

It was not quite so easy to manage this scene as the first one; for Lilias could not quite assure herself that Margaret's displeasure at being taken in might not overbalance the satisfaction of receiving so unexpected an advantage. But it ended by her own intervention and a vague tableau of happiness and union. How often she went over this story! She became, in imagination, much attached to this old cousin. She seemed to know him better than anyone about her. She would even make investigations into his life abroad, and get him to tell her stories of the things that had happened to him. Sometimes he would have lost his wife and an only child; sometimes he would be an old bachelor, always faithful to the memory of some grand-aunt whose portrait was in the library. It was a lady of the time of Queen Anne whom Lilias

had hit upon as the beloved of this old gentleman, but what did a century or so matter! She never found the mistake out.

This was her favourite way of finishing New Murkley, and restoring the family. But now and then, it cannot be denied, that there would gleam across her mind a recollection of her father's suggestion. A Glasgow man! In novels it was generally a Manchester man who took this part. Lilias supposed they were about the same, but her mind did not play with this idea. It flashed across her, and made her blush or made her indignant. It did not attract her as the old relation did. There is something in heiress-ship which changes a girl's feeling in this respect; the idea of getting everything from a lover, from a husband, was not pleasant to her. If she ever married, and this idea was not one that the girl did more than contemplate furtively for a moment, it would be without any thought of advantage. But the old cousin was a delightful romance. And there were other expedients besides this which now and then came in to vary the matter when she was tired of elaborating her first fancy; people whose fortunes had been founded on some help given by a Murray

But Jean had not the smallest inkling of what her sister's intentions could be.

As for Margaret, as soon as she had fully formed this determination in her own mind, her thoughts took a new impulse. She had thought over the question a great deal, but the new plan was struck out in a moment as by an inspiration. Her first idea had been Edinburgh, the metropolis of her youth, and the assemblies there which had been all the gaiety she had ever herself known. But Margaret had heard that Edinburgh was not all it once was, and the assemblies no longer the dazzling scenes they had been in her day. Besides, she reflected that there her choice would be very limited. She did not want a young advocate or legal functionary for Lilias. Many unexceptionable young men there were in these categories with good names and good blood. But this did not content her ambition. She wanted something greater, something more than an eligible *parti* or a good match. Such words were vulgar in comparison with the high ideal in her mind. She wanted the highest and best of all things for Lilias—a perfect lover, a husband worthy to be the prop and support and restorer of the house of Murray.

She knew very well that she would not be easily satisfied. Wealth would not be enough, nor good looks, nor a good name. She wanted all together, and she wanted something more. A fool, if he were a prince, would not have done for her, nor a man of genius unless he had been a true lover, putting Lilias above all women.

It may be imagined that the quest on which she was setting out was not an easy one. She followed it in her thoughts through many an imaginary scene. Miss Margaret was a very sensible woman; there was nobody better able to guide the affairs of her family. She was not easily taken in nor given to deceiving herself; yet, when in her imagination she went into the world of London and society there, no dream was ever more wildly unlike reality than were her thoughts. She evolved these scenes from her own consciousness, and moved about among them with a progress as purely visionary as that of Una or of Britomart. Like the one, she was in search of a true knight; like the other, ready to face all enchanters and overcome all perils; but the world into which she was about to launch was as little like the world of her fancy as was the court of Gloriana or the woods of Broceliande.

## CHAPTER III.

THE only thing which had shaken Lilias in the virginal calm of her thoughts was the example of little Katie Seton, a younger girl than herself, and whose system of education had been so different. While Lilias had been kept under the wing of her sisters, apart from any encounter, Katie had been introduced to everything their little world contained of wild sensation and adventure. She had entered upon the agitations of love-making almost as soon as she was in her teens, and her sixteenth birthday was scarcely past when she appeared one afternoon, as Lilias put away her books, evidently in all the excitement of some great news to communicate, which Miss Margaret's presence kept in, though Katie was bursting with it. Miss Margaret, as was natural, stayed in the schoolroom, which was still the special haunt of Lilias,

much longer than was usual. It was a rainy day, and no walk was possible. Is it from perversity and desire to interfere with the pleasures of the young—pleasures now out of their own reach—that the elder people will linger and keep girls and boys on the rack when they have things to say to each other not intended for elder ears? Katie thought so as she sat biting her lips, hardly able to keep still, brimming over with her news; and Lilias, who divined that there was something unusual, almost was tempted to think so too, as Miss Margaret considered over the book-shelves, looking for she did not know what, and opened all the drawers to find an old exercise-book which was of no interest at the moment.

'Oh! if you will just leave it to me, I will find it, Margaret,' Lilias cried.

'You would find it the easier for knowing what it is,' said Margaret, grimly, 'which is almost more than I do myself. I will know it by head-mark when I see it.'

'Let me turn out the drawer,' cried Katie, officiously.

Miss Margaret looked at the girl with humorous perversity.

'What nonsense are you plotting between you?' she said. 'Katie, your eyes are just leaping out of your head, and you have not been still a moment since you came into this room, every flounce in motion——'

'Could anybody help it?' cried Katie. 'Such a day!—and me just wanting Lilias to come out and see the garden. The lilacs are all out, and everything so sweet: and now this pouring rain will spoil them all. I am just like to cry,' said Katie, the corners of her mouth drooping. But Miss Margaret knew very well it was not for the lilacs or the rain, but for excitement and impatience, that Katie was like to cry.

'Well, well,' she said, 'I suppose you must have your bits of secrets at your age; there will be no great harm in them. I will find my book another time. But mind you don't stay too long in this room, which is cold when there is no sun, but come into the drawing-room to your tea. You will find me there, and Jean —and sense,' said Miss Margaret, with her back turned to them, calmly selecting a book from the shelves—'if you should happen to stand in any need of that last——'

'Oh, no, no!' cried Katie, when at last Miss

Margaret went away, running to shut the door after her, and make sure at least of being alone with her friend, 'we stand in no need of that. Oh, Lilias!' she said, rushing up to her companion and flinging her arms round her with such vehemence that the slight girl swayed with the sudden shock.

'What is it, Katie?' Lilias cried. 'What is it? Tell me, but do not knock me down.'

'Oh, it is you that are sense,' cried Katie, with a sort of fury, pushing her friend into the big chair, and falling down herself at the side of it, with her arms on Lilias' knee. There was a degree of violence in these preliminaries; for Katie, though full of a woman's secret, was still half girl, half boy in her early development, as the sister of many brothers is apt to be. Lilias, so much more delicate and dainty, took hold of the hands which had numberless scratches upon them, nails cut to the quick, and other indications of having been put to boyish uses, and held them in her own white fingers closely clasped.

'I am as anxious to hear as you are to tell,' she said. 'Quick, quick, tell me! What is the matter? Have they sent him away?'

'Oh, Lily! Something far more wonderful. There is no knowing what they may do. They will do something dreadful—they will do anything to part us. Oh, Lily! you'll never, never tell anybody, not even Miss Jean—not a word! I'll never, never speak to you all my life, if you tell upon me now!'

'I tell upon you! Did I ever tell upon you?' said Lilias, indignant. 'That about Robbie Bairnsfather was found out. It was never me.'

'I know you will not tell,' said Katie. 'You are just my own Lily. You will never say a word. Lilias! I'm——oh, can't you guess? We are—engaged— It is quite true. Look,' the girl cried, with a glowing countenance, opening a button of her boddice and drawing forth from under it a little ring, attached to a ribbon. Her hand trembled, though it was the hand of a tom-boy. Her face shone; tears were in the eyes which were, as Miss Margaret said, 'leaping out of her head.'

'Engaged!' cried Lilias. 'Oh, you gave me such a fright. When I saw the ring, I thought you were going to say you were—married. Let me get my breath.'

'Married!' Katie said, with a certain contempt. To be married would be the prose of the transaction. She felt herself upon a higher, more ethereal altitude. 'That would be nothing,' she said. 'There would be no secret then. Oh, Lily, isn't it wonderful? This is a ring that is his very own, that an old lady gave him when he was a boy. Look at it! It's all turquoise, and turquoise means happiness. He put it on my finger, but I dare not wear it on my finger, for mamma would be sure to notice. She notices everything. Old people,' said Katie, aggrieved, 'pretend to wear spectacles, and all that, as if they couldn't see: but nothing escapes them! I can't put a pin in my collar, but mamma will see it. "Katie, Katie!' she always says; and I know in a moment what it is. Oh, but she would say, "Katie, Katie!" twice as loud, if she saw this! So I wear it round my neck: but I may put it on here,' Katie said. 'Look, Lilias! Isn't it bonnie? I always wanted a ring, but I never thought I would get the engaged ring the very first of all.'

There was a little triumph in Katie's tone. Not only was Lilias far, very far, from being the proud possessor of an 'engaged' ring, but

she had scarcely been allowed 'to speak to a gentleman'—a thing Mrs. Seton thought the worst policy—in all her life.

'But never mind the ring. Tell me about—what happened,' said Lilias. 'You have not even told me who it is.'

'Oh!' cried Katie, red with indignation, 'who could it be but *him*? I am sure I have never said a word, or even thought of anybody but him for—for ages,' she added, with a little vagueness, sinking from the assumed superiority of her former tone.

'Well, dear,' said Lilias, soothingly, 'but then, you know, there was Mr. Dunlop.'

'I never cared a bit about him. He was only just in the way. You have to let a gentleman speak to you when he is in your way.'

'I suppose so,' said Lilias, with a faint sigh. Such an experience had never happened to herself. 'But how was I to know? And it is not very long since—but it *is* Philip? Oh, yes, I supposed so all along, especially as it is such a secret. If it had been Mr. Dunlop it would have been no secret—or Robbie—or—'

'I wish you would not speak such nonsense. I never, never thought—it was only just for

fun. I never in all my life cared for anybody but him! Oh, never; you may say what you please, but it's only me that can know.'

'That is true,' said Lilias, with gentle conviction. 'But tell me how it happened, and when—and what he said, and what you said. It will be like a story, but only far, far more interesting,' Lilias said.

'It was not like a story at all,' said Katie, with some indignation. 'Am I that kind of person? We just happened to meet down by the waterside. Oh yes, I am fond of walking there; and the boys were after a water-rat, as they always are, and the little girls were somewhere—I am sure I never can tell where they go. Mamma scolds me when they tear their frocks, but is it likely I can run into all their hiding holes with them at my age?'

'And then?' said Lilias, conducting her penitent skilfully over this obstacle.

'And then—oh, well, nothing particular. He happens often to be that way himself. It is the prettiest walk. I was rather glad to see him coming; for, you know, neither the boys nor the girls are just companions for me. And then I asked him when he was going away,

and he said would I be sorry? and I said, oh yes, I would be sorry; for he was always somebody to speak to. And he said, was that all? And I said, oh, you know that we danced the same step, and that was always nice. And then he said—oh, just nonsense; that *I* was always nice, or something like that; and then he said he would never go away, if he could help it. And I said, what was he going for, then? And he said, because he was too fond of somebody that never thought upon him. Of course I knew well enough what he meant, but I pretended to be very sorry, and said, who could that be?'

Katie made a very pretty picture as she told her story. She was leaning her elbows on Lilias' lap, and playing with the long chain which Lilias, after the fashion of the time, wore to her watch, and which was the object of Katie's warmest admiration. She was twisting this in her fingers, tying knots in it, occupying her eyes with it, and escaping her friend's gaze, though she sometimes paused for a moment and gave a glance upward. Her little blooming face was in a glow of colour and excitement, ready to laugh, ready to cry. As

for Lilias, she was full of attention, bending forward, her face following every variation of her friend's.

'But,' Lilias said, 'I thought it was not he that wanted to go away, but Mrs. Stormont that was sending him.'

'Oh,' cried Katie, 'I wish you would not insist upon everything like a printed book. I am telling you what he said—I was never saying it was all true. They never tell exactly the truth,' Katie interrupted herself to say, with conviction. 'There is always a little more—or just a little twist to make you believe—— But you can understand that, if you have any sense. I said —who could that be? and he said, "Oh, Katie!" just like mamma.'

'And then?' cried Lilias, breathless.

'Oh, there was nothing particular then,' said Katie, all one blush, 'but just nonsense, you know; and fancy, he had been carrying *this* about all the time, always wanting to give it to me! He just put it on, and then we were engaged,' Katie said.

'Oh, Katie, what a terrible thing to happen! And then did you just go home as usual, and never say a word?'

'What could I say? I would not tell mamma for all the world. She would want to make a business of it, and tell Mrs. Stormont, and get it all settled. She would want us to be married; but I don't want to be married—I want to have my fun.'

'Oh, Katie!'

'Everybody says "Oh, Katie!"' said the girl, plaintively; 'but that does not make any difference. It is not dreadful at all—it is very nice. I belong to him, and he belongs to me; he tells me everything, and I tell him everything. But we don't want to make a fuss; we are quite happy as we are. Mrs. Stormont would just go daft, you know. She knows quite well that is what it is coming to—oh, I can see it in her eyes! I think she would like to send me to prison, if she could, to get me out of Philip's way.'

'But, Katie, if you think that——'

'Oh, it does not make any difference to me; perhaps I would do the same myself. There's our Robbie, if he wanted to be married, I would think he was mad, and mamma would be—I don't know what mamma wouldn't do. I suppose it's natural. Everybody wants their own

people to do well for themselves, and I have no money, not a penny. Mrs. Stormont would have been quite pleased, Lilias, if it had been you.'

'Me!' said Lilias, with a blush, but a slight erection of her head; she laughed to carry off the slight shock of offence. 'But that would not have done at all,' she said.

'Oh, no, it is just the same thing; you are too good, and I'm not good enough. If it had been you, Miss Margaret would have tried to have *him* sent to prison; and perhaps, when there is somebody found grand enough for you, Lilias, *his* folk will not be pleased. That is always the way,' said the shrewd Katie, shaking her head; 'but it happens, all the same. Isn't it bonnie?' she added, returning to the former subject, and holding up her hand with the ring on it. 'Turquoise is the right thing for an engaged ring; but, when your one comes, never let him give you an opal, Lilias—that is such bad luck.'

'Oh! if anyone were to come—as you say: I should think of something else than rings,' Lilias said, and blushed at the thought. It seemed to her a little breach of modesty even to speak of any such incident. When, in the fulness of

time, it came, what a strange and wonderful event! but not to be profaned by anticipation. Her heart gave a throb, then left the subject in silence. 'But it will have to be known some time,' she said.

Katie shrugged her little shoulders.

'It will not be through me,' she said. 'They say a girl can't keep a secret, but just you try me. He can do what he likes, but I will never tell—never, not if I were to be put on the rack.'

'But, Katie, do you think it is right? To live at home and see your father and mother every day, and not tell them—you could not do it!'

'Just you try me,' said Katie. 'Do you think in the persecuting days I would have told where they were hidden—or Prince Charlie?' cried the girl, with pardonable confusion. 'Never!—I would never have minded either the thumbscrew or the boot.'

'But I don't think this is the same,' said Lilias, doubtfully. 'You will be always seeing him, meeting him, and they will not know; and you will have secrets, and he will tell you things, and you will tell him things, and yet at home they will not know.'

'That is just the fun of it,' Katie cried.

'Oh, I cannot see any fun in that. And it will be so difficult; you will forget, you will say something when you do not intend——'

'Not me,' cried Katie. 'I hope I have my wits about me. I will never betray him; whoever is not true, I will always be true.'

Lilias was somewhat staggered by this view of the subject, but she was not convinced. She shook her head.

'I could not do it,' she said.

'Oh, you! No, you could not do it; but then you could not do any of it,' cried Katie. 'You have been brought up by old maids; you are never let speak to a gentleman at all; it never could happen to you,' she cried, with a little triumph.

And Lilias, for her part, had to allow to herself, with a certain sense of humiliation, that Katie was right. It never would happen to her. No Orlando would ever be able to hang verses on the trees at Murkley, even no Philip meet her out walking by the riverside, and woo her in Katie's artless way. She wondered how it ever could be permitted to happen at all—or would it never happen, and she herself live and

die without any other experience, like Jean and Margaret? Her heart fluttered in her maiden bosom with the strangeness of the question. She did not believe in the depths of her heart that it never could happen. In some miraculous way, as it happened to the ladies of romance, it would come to her. But it would be very different from Katie's story—everything about it would be different. The news roused her mind and affected her dreams in spite of herself. That night, in her maiden sleep, never interrupted heretofore by such visions, she dreamed that some one took her hand and put a ring upon it—a big blob of blue, far bigger than Katie's turquoise, which changed as she looked at it into the strange changing tints of an opal. She thought it very strange that she should dream of this just after Katie's disquisition on the subject. The two things did not present themselves to Lilias' mind under the semblance of cause and effect. But it vexed her that she could not in the least make out who it was that put the ring upon her hand. She was not destitute of jewellery as Katie was, though Miss Margaret discouraged ornaments; but she had neither a turquoise nor an opal in her stones.

And there were other ways in which Katie's story affected Lilias. She could not help thinking of the meetings of the lovers. She had herself gone sometimes when she was younger, with Katie to the walk by the water-side, when the boys went after water-rats or rabbits, and the little girls made 'little housies' in the sand of the old quarry. In those days Lilias and Katie strolled up and down, superior to the children, talking of a hundred things. Lilias knew how it would all be. She went out herself into the Ghost's Walk, where it was always permitted her to walk when she pleased, and thought wistfully, with a little sigh, of the waterside and all its freedom, the children busy, their voices softened in the distance, and the two in the centre of the landscape, whose whispering would be—something different. What it would be, Lilias did not know. In the very secretest corner of her imagination little broken dialogues had gone on between herself and—another. But they had been too secret, too vague even to come into the legitimate and acknowledged land of visions in which the old Australian cousin had played so large a part. Katie's story dismissed that benevolent old man with his full

purse from Lilias' imagination, and brought those far less perfect germs of dreaming into prominence instead.

The sunset was still blazing over the river, when it was already twilight in the Ghost's Walk, which lay on the other side of the house, and saw no sunshine later than noon. Lilias paced about under the silken foliage of the limes in the still air, which was full of dreams, and felt herself left outside of life, looking at it from a distance with a visionary pensive sadness. There was something in the air, the subdued light, the sense of evening all about, which chimed in with this mood. It was curious to think of Katie, so much younger than herself, enjoying everything, the flush of youthful sunshine, while she was thus left out. But Lilias felt at the same time a certain gentle superiority, the elevation of the pensive vestal, in delicate solitude and retirement, over the common ways of the world. She walked about in a soft dream, with a sigh, yet with a sensation of gentle grandeur which made up for and was enhanced by the sadness. As she paused under the great old lime-tree which was in the centre of the walk, the soft sounds which

distinguished the family spectre were very audible. She knew the story of that gentle lady who had died for love. None of the Murrays were afraid of her. To have seen her would have been a distinction—they had heard her from generation to generation. There was even a tradition in the family that one time or other, when the wedded mistress of the house should be at the same a daughter of the house, a Murray born, the lady of the walk would appear to her, and pace by her side, and tell her something that would be well for the race.

Lilias paused, and looked about her with pride, and tenderness, and a thrill of anticipation. She had thought often that she herself might be that destined lady; but the thought had never moved her as now. It awoke a little tumult in her bosom as she stood there in the subdued evening air full of the recollection of the love tale that had been told her. Margaret and Jean walked in the Ghost's Walk without any such movements or beatings of the heart. Lilias felt a great awe come over her as she stood and listened. If ever these soft steps that had paced about under the limes for two hundred years should turn aside from their

habitual walk, and the air above them shape into a vision, what wonderful events must happen first? She stood silent, almost without breathing for a moment, and then she drew the skirt of her dress over her arm, and fled into the house as if something had been pursuing her. It was not that she was afraid of any ghostly appearance; but she was afraid of the rustling of the wings of the coming years, and of the events that were approaching her through the silence, the things that were to shape her life. What were they?—perhaps patience, perhaps sorrow, such as women so often have to dwell with. Perhaps, who could tell, Love, the unknown, the greatest of all. She fled from them and the thought of them, whatever they might be.

## CHAPTER IV.

'DID you ever hear that a turquoise was lucky and an opal an ill stone?'

Lilias was seated beside her sisters in the drawing-room in the soft darkness of the summer night. But that there were two lamps lighted, shining like two dim earth-stars in the large dim room, with its dark wainscot and faded velvet curtains, you would scarcely have known it was night. The windows were not closed, and the pale day had not altogether died. There was still light enough to read by; but Simon brought in the lamps at a certain hour, without much respect to the state of the daylight. They lighted up each the circle of the table on which it stood, but made the rest of the room darker than before. The three ladies were seated about one of these tables. Jean was knitting—a piece of work better

adapted for this light than her famous table-cover; Margaret was reading the newspaper. The *Times* (for they indulged in the luxury of the *Times*, considered to be rather an extravagance in these parts) arrived at night, which was a wonder they were never tired of expatiating upon. 'Published in London this morning, and here in my hands within the twelve hours; it is just a miracle,' Miss Margaret was fond of saying. The large broad-sheet caught the glow of the lamp, and made a large white space in the dimness, in the midst of which Margaret's countenance was set. It made a rustling as she turned it over, and from time to time she read out a paragraph. The others were not much given to the newspaper. They heard enough of it from the bits that Miss Margaret read out. Being a person of very decided and consistent political views, she despised and detested the politics of her favourite newspaper, and would sometimes read out a leading article with a string of satirical comments, which, had Miss Jean known a little more about it, or Lilias taken a greater degree of interest, would have been amusing. But in neither case did it tell as it ought. Miss Margaret was used to a want of sympathy in this

respect; but it is to be supposed that in the mere utterance aloud of her sentiments there was some pleasure, for she continued to express them without much reference to her audience. Miss Jean threw in a word now and then, mostly in deprecation.

'No, no, Margaret, I can't think that; the man will just be mistaken,' she would say, or, 'No, no—it's just a matter of opinion.'

'Opinion!' Miss Margaret would say. 'An idiot might hold the opinion that white is black—but it takes a dishonest person to say white is white one day, and black the next.'

'Whisht, whisht, Margaret; how can you tell it is the same person?' Miss Jean would say.

Lilias scarcely took any notice at all. She was at the age when a young creature can carry on two mental processes at once. She was thinking all the time, dreaming her dreams, holding all sorts of dialogues within herself, but at the same time she heard every word and remembered, and could strike in when it pleased her. All her faculties were as vivid as youth and life could make them. She missed nothing and forgot nothing, yet never paid the least

attention. To do this is what we all are capable of in our day.

Lilias sat on the other side of the round table with a box before her filled with trinkets. There was nothing of any great value in the little velvet-lined shelves and drawers; they were her mother's girlish ornaments, and the presents that had been made to herself from time to time, and the little nothings that gather in an old house, brooches and bracelets that had belonged to former generations, and which, found from time to time lying in a drawer, had been handed over with a 'Would you like to have it?' from Margaret, or a pleased exclamation, 'This will just do for Lilias,' from Jean. Her mother's diamonds, which, though they were not very rich or rare, were still diamonds, were locked up securely for her against the time when she should be old enough to wear them; but the contents of the box which was now upon the table had given Lilias far more pleasure than she would ever get from diamonds. The cornelians and old-fashioned topazes and amethysts, the twisted chains and necklets and filigree brooches, had been her delight for years. She had put them upon her dolls when

she was a child. Afterwards it had been one of her great pleasures to arrange and polish them, and seduce Jean into telling her over and over again the story of this one and the other. That was old Sir Claude's hair set round with a mourning border of black and a row of small lustrous pearls: the topazes? 'Oh! I remember them very well; old Aunt Barbara used to wear them. She was grandpapa's aunt, and she lived to be nearly a hundred. I remember how I used to wonder—' and so on, and so on.

Lilias had heard all the stories a hundred times, but she liked them still; they were associated to her with many a cheerful, feverish hour, and many a delightful, childish convalescence. While Jean knitted her white fleecy wool and Margaret read her paper, Lilias took out and put in again the shining little ornaments, caressing them with her slim fingers. They were her earliest childish property; many of them were hideous, but she did not like them the worse for that. She had just taken out a little bracelet set with little turquoises, some of which had grown green instead of blue with age and neglect. Then it was that she made the little speech above recorded. 'Did you ever

hear that a turquoise was lucky and an opal an ill stone?'

'Not an ill stone,' said Miss Jean, who could not bear to hear the character even of a stone taken away, 'it is just beautiful; but it is a common saying that it brings ill-luck. I do not believe in any such nonsense. Long ago it had a different character. Dear me, what was the property it had? Margaret will mind.'

'What are you saying about Margaret? What will I mind? You think I have room for all the trash that can be collected in my poor head, like Lilias' trinket-box. Opals! they were said to change colour when they were near poison. But we are in no risk of poison, and I'm not fond of them. Where did you hear anything about opals, or turquoise either?' Miss Margaret said.

The question confused Lilias slightly, for it brought vividly before her the great communication Katie had made to her, and the necessity for keeping it secret.

'Oh, I did not hear much about them,' she said.

'It would be in some story-book,' said Miss Jean. 'It is just the thing to be in a story-

book. But there is no luckiness or unluckiness in stones. That is just superstition.'

'It is a thing you know nothing about,' said Miss Margaret, 'nor me either. We'll wait till we know before we pronounce judgment.'

She put down her paper in one hand, so that the light and shade of the group was a little altered, and she looked keenly at Lilias through her spectacles. For she had already taken to spectacles, though all her contemporaries declared it to be affectation. She would have seen her little sister better without them, but Miss Margaret was of opinion that they increased the dignity of her appearance, and conveyed an impression of more penetrating insight. She always put them on when she had some reproof to make.

'What set Katie talking of jewels?' she said. 'She has none, that I know of.'

'Oh, for nothing at all,' said Lilias; and then she added, 'We were speaking of rings, and she said what she liked best.'

'Which was turquoise? The little cutty, what does she know about such things? It will be some love-business. I hope her mother knows, or that good Christian, her father, that

they just turn round their little fingers. But I'll have no talk about lovers here.'

'Margaret!' said Miss Jean, with a look of distress. 'Oh, I hope you are not hardening your heart, and judging your neighbours. Little Katie is a harmless thing. She is no more than a child. I suppose Lilias was showing her the things in the box. I would give her that bit bracelet, if I were you, Lily. You will never miss it, and what she wants is just a little ornament or two. Mrs. Seton takes a great deal of trouble with her dress. It does her mother great credit, Katie's dress, for they are far from rich. Since she is fond of turquoises, I would give her the bracelet: and I think I could find a locket to go with it.'

'How kind you are, Jean—even though you don't approve of Katie.'

'There is nobody that Jean does not approve of,' said Miss Margaret, 'if she thinks she has anything that they would like. As for that little thing, the best thing they can do with her is to marry her. She should marry the helper at the Braehead, who, they tell me, will be assistant and successor, for Mr. Morrison is an old man, and very frail. It would be a very suitable mar-

riage, just in their own condition of life, and really a very presentable person.'

'Katie does not think he is in their own condition of life.'

'Katie is just a—cutty. I have always disliked that in a minister's family. They look down upon their own kind. Well, there is the young man that plays the piano. I am not fond of men that give themselves up to music. The piano is a fine thing for girls that have little to do. And that's well thought upon—I have not heard you practise, Lilias, for a whole month.'

'I played all my pieces over the day before yesterday,' said Lilias, with a little indignation.

'Oh, Lilias!' cried Miss Jean, putting up her hands, 'as if it were just mechanical, to hear you speak like that.'

'I see no harm in what she says,' said Miss Margaret. 'But when a thing has been learnt, and cost a good deal of trouble, it should not just be let down. I was saying that young man who plays the piano. He's a stranger here. If he has a good profession, or anything to live on, they might get him for Katie. I would marry her early, if she belonged to me, which,

the Lord be thanked, she does not, nor any of her kind.'

'There is no harm in her that I can see,' said the gentler sister.

Miss Margaret answered with that monosyllabic sound which it is common to spell, 'Humph,' and went back to her newspaper; and then the little group fell again into soft silence, full of thinkings and dreamings. Miss Jean, indeed, did not do much beyond counting the stitches of her knitting. She was capable of refraining even from thought. She had no harsh conclusions in her mind, nor anything to disturb her. The hours slid on softly. She was happy to see the others occupied, to have no jar in the air, nothing to derange the harmony of the gentle silence. The little oppositions between her sister and herself never came to any discord. And, as for Lilias, she had begun to occupy herself, with the pleasure of a child, in stringing some pretty blue Venetian beads, which it was quite a pleasure to find loose. The girl was delighted with the task—she threaded them one by one, letting each drop upon the other with a little tinkle. This made a sort of merry accompaniment to her thoughts, and, after the foregoing

interruption, she took up those thoughts—if thoughts they can be called—just where she had left them, and resumed the dialogue she had been carrying on. It was a dialogue between herself and—the other. He had just saved her life (for the hundredth time), and she was thanking him, and he, with words which meant far more than they sounded, was giving her to understand that for him to save her life was mere selfishness, for what would the world be without her? It was Katie's communication which had emboldened Lilias to carry on a conversation like this in the very presence of her sisters. She indulged generally in it only in snatches, in the uttermost retirement. Now at the very table sitting with them she ventured upon it. What would they think if they knew? This gave her a quiver of laughter and pain and pleasure all together—laughter to think how little they knew, pain to contemplate the possibility that they might find out. But in fact that did not come into the bounds of possibility. Thus the three sisters sat together, and knew just as much and as little of each other as is common with human folk.

It was about this time that Lewis first came to

the house to play to Miss Jean; but of this Lilias was not supposed to know anything. She had seen him to be a stranger when they had first met on the road, and she had perceived, with a mixture of amusement and pique that whereas he looked with a good deal of curiosity at her sister, her own blue veil had been a sort of sanctuary for herself. Lilias could not but think he must be a stupid young man not to have divined. It tickled her to think that he had passed her quite over and gazed at Margaret and Jean. But he did not interest her much. Nothing could be more unlike the fine specimen of manhood over six feet high, with dark eyes that went to your very soul, who was in the habit most evenings of saving Lilias' life, than this common-place young man who never looked at her. Lewis was not tall; there was not much colour about him. He did not seem at all like a person who could stop a runaway horse, or burst through a flaming door, or leap a wall to render instant and efficient help as that hero had now done so often that Lilias felt a little variety would be desirable. When she met him again at the new castle, she was still more amused by his startled look at her,

and by the way in which he permitted Miss Margaret to swoop upon him and carry him off. There was something amiable, something *nice* about him, she thought. He was like a brother. Sometimes in novels the heroine will have a brother who is completely under her control, who takes his opinions and views from her, and is useful at last in marrying her confidant, as well as in backing herself up generally, whatever she may have to do. It seemed to Lilias that he would do very well for that *rôle.* She was seized with sudden kindness for him after that second encounter. And then it amused her much that Margaret thought it necessary to carry off this mild, colourless, smiling youth out of her way. From the moment this happened she made up her mind to make his acquaintance, and it was not in such utter innocence as Jean supposed that Lilias made that sudden appearance in the drawing-room, cutting short a proposal upon the very lips of Lewis, and interrupting the high tension of the situation. The dinner that followed, the startled look which he had cast upon herself, his silence and bewildered absorption when he sat opposite to her, and the discomfiture of Margaret, had all been exceed-

ingly amusing to the young plotter. She meant no harm, neither to Lewis nor to her sisters. She neither meant to make a conquest of the stranger, nor to alarm her anxious guardians. She wanted a little fun. She was a girl full of imagination, full of poetical attributes: but by times an imperious desire for a little fun will overwhelm the sagest bosom of eighteen. She could not resist the impulse. To see the agitation she had caused was delightful. She could scarcely contain her laugh as she sat down opposite to him and saw his wondering looks, and perceived the efforts of Miss Margaret to keep his attention engaged. Lilias had been very demure. She had sat at table like an innocent little schoolgirl who thought of nothing but her lessons. She became conscious after a while that he had once or twice met her eye when she was off her guard, and probably had caught the sparkle of malice in it; and then Lilias began to feel guilty, but this was not till the meal was nearly over, and she had got her amusement out of it. She disappeared the moment they rose from table, determined to show Margaret that she meant no harm. And indeed Miss Margaret was too anxious to put 'nothing in her head,' to suggest

no ideas to the young mind which she believed so innocent, to say a word as to this incident. It was quite natural that the child in her guilelessness should ask the stranger to come to dinner.

'I feel it a reproach on myself,' Margaret said. 'It's not the habit in any house of ours to let a visitor go without breaking bread. I did not do it myself because of a feeling, that is perhaps an unworthy feeling, that he came of none of the Murrays we know of, and that I'm not fond of sitting down with a person that might not be just a——'

'Oh, don't say not a gentleman, Margaret,' cried Jean. 'He might be an angel to hear him play.'

'Ah! well, that might be: an angel is not necessarily——' Miss Margaret said, with a curious dryness. 'But you were quite right, Lilias. It's what I desire that a creature like you should just do what is right without thinking of any reason against it.'

Margaret's brow had a pucker of care in it even when she said this, and Lilias felt so guilty that she had nearly fallen on her knees and confessed her little trick. But to what good? Had she confessed, they would have

thought her far more to blame than she really was; they would have thought she wanted to make the stranger's acquaintance, or had some secret inclination towards him, whereas all that she wanted was fun, a thing as different as night from day.

'This young man was probably saying something to you about himself,' Miss Margaret said. 'Lilias, you may go to your books, and I will come to you in half an hour or so. You have the air of being a little put about, Jean. I would be glad of your confidence, if you have no objection. I hope there is nothing that can occur that will come between you and me.'

'Come between you and me!' cried Miss Jean, in astonishment. 'I know nothing that could do that, Margaret; but, dear me! you must mean something. You would not say a thing like that just merely without any cause. Confidence!—I have no confidence to give. You know me just as well as I know myself.'

'Is that so?' said the elder sister, looking at her with penetrating eyes.

'Why should it not be so? There must be something on your mind, Margaret.'

'There is nothing on my mind. No doubt

this young man was saying something to you—about himself.'

'I cannot remember what he said,' said Miss Jean; and then she uttered an exclamation of annoyance. 'How selfish I am!' she said—'just like all the rest. We listen to what concerns us, and not a bit to what concerns another person. Yes, he did tell me something, poor lad, about settling down here. I was surprised, for what should a young man do here? and yet you do not like to say a word against it, when it's your own place. It is like saying you will take no notice of him, or that there's some reason why he shouldn't come. I was very glad when Lilias came in; it saved me from making any answer, and I did not know what to say.'

'Dear me!' said Miss Margaret, still suspicious. 'It must have been something out of the common if you were so much at a loss as that.'

Jean looked at her for a moment with doubtful eyes.

'If it had been only me, it would have been easy enough,' she said. 'I would have said, "If you settle here, Mr. Murray, we will be very glad from time to time to see you at the Castle, and if you should be going to marry, as would

be natural, my sisters and me will do what we can to make the place agreeable to your young lady." That is what I would have said if it had been only me; for to play such music as you is given to few, and my opinion is that nobody but a well-educated person, and one that was gentle by nature, could ever do it. But when I remembered that you had not that way of knowing, and were a little suspicious of the lad that he might be a common person, I was just silenced, and could not find a word to say.'

Margaret had turned away to conceal a certain constraint that was in her countenance. She waited for a few minutes with her back to her sister, looking out of the window, before she ventured to speak.

'I am glad he was so modest,' she said; 'but what would he do settling here in this quiet little place?'

'That is just what I said,' said Jean, all unconscious. 'I told him he would repent. And he really is a most innocent, single-minded youth, for he said something quite plain about looking to us for society, which made it more hard for me to give him no encouragement.

But I did not like to take it upon me as you were not there.'

Upon this Margaret turned round upon her placid sister with a little excitement.

'You are old enough to judge for yourself, Jean. You have a good right to choose for yourself. I'm a woman of strong opinions, I cannot help it. But you're a gentle creature, and you have a heart as young as Lilias. Just do what you think best, and don't let anything depend on me.'

Jean looked up with a little surprise at this speech. 'I have no desire,' she said, 'my dear Margaret, to set up my judgment in that way. We're one, we're not two, we have always been of the same mind. Perhaps we will hear something more satisfactory about his family; for I have a real hope you will take the young man up. He has very nice manners, and his touch is just extraordinary. It would be such a good thing for Lilias, too. To see him at the piano is better than many a lesson. So I hope you will take the best view you can of him. To bring him to dinner was very startling to me, but it is fine that Lilias has such a sense of hospitality.'

All this Jean said with a manner so entirely undisturbed that Margaret could not tell what to think. It was she who was abashed and confused—she who had supposed it possible that her sister could be moved by the young man's nonsense. Indeed, when she came to think it over, she felt almost a conviction that it was she herself who was mistaken. Jean evidently was totally unenlightened in respect to any intentions he might have. It must have been she who had made the mistake. She was not fond of acknowledging herself in the wrong, even to herself, but it was fortunate at least that no one else knew the delusion she had been under, and still more fortunate that now that delusion was past.

## CHAPTER V.

THE framework of society at Murkley was of a simple description. There were no great gatherings in that corner of the country-side. A dinner-party happened now and then, but these were very rare, for most of the best families dined in the middle of the day in a primitive manner, and a great dinner meant an overthrow of all the habits of the house. Usually friends came to tea, and remained, as in the manse, when the majority was young, to dance: or in other houses, when the majority were older people, to play a friendly rubber, with a round game for such youth as might be of the party. The routine was completely stereotyped; for human nature is very uninventive, especially in the country. Sometimes there was an attempt to vary this procedure by 'a little music;' but in those days music

was less cultivated than now, and a few pieces of the 'Battle of Prague' kind, were usually all that were to be found in a young lady's repertoire, varied perhaps by 'Sweet Spirit, hear my Prayer,' and other elegant *morceaux* of that description. And it is much to be feared that, had the music been of a higher order, it would have been relished still less; for however little the art of conversation may be cultivated as an art, and however little entertainment there may be in it, everybody resents the stoppage of talk, and the gloomy countenance of even the most æsthetic of parties, when compelled to silent listening, continues to prove how much more attractive are our own sweet voices than anything that supersedes them. Society in Murkley would willingly put up with a few songs. It is true that it knew them by heart, but the good people were always charitable on this point, and liked, 'Oh, no, we never mention her!' just as well the hundredth time as the first. And there was another thing which many of the elder ladies could do without any vanity on the subject, or even any idea that the gift was more than a convenience. They played dance music with the greatest spirit and ac-

curacy. Mrs. Seton possessed this talent, and so to some extent did Mrs. Stormont, though she put it to less frequent use, and had not the real enjoyment which the minister's wife had in the exercise of her talent. These ladies were surprised to be complimented on the subject. It was no credit to them. It was 'just a necessity where there are young people,' Mrs. Seton said; a sort of maternal accomplishment which everybody took for granted. But though the entertainments and social constitution were so simple, the same schemes and hopes underlay them as were to be found on the highest levels. It was, as has been said, the dearest object of Miss Margaret's heart to keep her little sister safe, and preserve her from all youthful entanglements of sentiment. But Mrs. Stormont of the Tower had a dearest object which was entirely in opposition to Margaret's. Her dream was to secure for her own Philip this very lily of Murkley which was kept so persistently in the shade. Mrs. Stormont had been an old friend of the General; they had called themselves old friends for years with a twinkle in the eye of one and a conscious smile upon the corners of the other's mouth, which would have betrayed their little

secret had not the countryside in general known it as well as they did. They had been, in fact, lovers in their youth, and all the skill of their respective families had been exercised once upon a time to keep them apart. The attempt had been quite successful, and neither Mrs. Stormont nor the General had been sorry in after-life. They had talked it over with a laugh when they met again, more than twenty years after, each with a little mental comment. It was shortly after the General's second marriage, when, in the pride and triumph of having won for himself so young and delightful a bride, he too felt himself delightful and young as in his best days.

'Good Lord! to think I might have been tied to that old woman!' he said to himself. She was some years younger than he was, and a handsome woman, but she was not like Lady Lilias at eighteen.

Mrs. Stormont's reflections were of a different order. She went about all day after, saying, 'Tchich-tchich,' to herself at intervals, or rather making that little sound with the tongue upon the palate which is the language of mild astonishment mingled with dismay. 'He prom-

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no ideas to the young mind which she believed so innocent, to say a word as to this incident. It was quite natural that the child in her guilelessness should ask the stranger to come to dinner.

'I feel it a reproach on myself,' Margaret said. 'It's not the habit in any house of ours to let a visitor go without breaking bread. I did not do it myself because of a feeling, that is perhaps an unworthy feeling, that he came of none of the Murrays we know of, and that I'm not fond of sitting down with a person that might not be just a——'

'Oh, don't say not a gentleman, Margaret,' cried Jean. 'He might be an angel to hear him play.'

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young people like to have a little dance after, I would not stop them; but no preparations—just the table drawn away into a corner——'

'Oh! you do yourself injustice,' said Mrs. Stormont; 'I consider those little parties very dangerous. I can understand very well why Margaret will not let Lilias go.'

'Dangerous!' cried Mrs. Seton. 'Dear me, what could put such a word into your head? My visitors are all very young, that is the worst of them. No, no, I should say it was the best. They are so young, they have nothing in their heads but just the dancing. Oh! perhaps you will be meaning Philip? Well, you should know best. I don't pretend to fathom what's in a young man's mind; but I see no signs of anything else but just a little natural pleasure. I was wild about dancing in my own day. And so is Katie after me. I cannot say a word to her. It's just like myself in my time.'

'Oh! I think I have heard that,' Mrs. Stormont said.

Now it was very well known that the minister's wife in her day had been a little person full of flirtations and naughtiness; and there was a good deal of significance in the tone in which

the other lady spoke. But Mrs. Seton was clothed in armour of proof, and knew no harm of herself.

'I will never deny it,' she said. 'I was at every dance I could hear of. And Katie would be just the same, only that there are no dances— except the bit little things, which are not to be called dances, which we give ourselves. I will take her to the Hunt Ball when she is old enough; but it is not the like of that a young creature wants. She wants just her fun and a little movement; and to have something to talk about among her friends. Oh! the chatter they will keep up when two or three of them get together. You would think my little tea-parties were grand balls, nothing less.'

'I consider them far more dangerous than your grand balls,' said Mrs. Stormont. 'The young men, when they go to the Hunt Ball, are on their guard; but he must be a very suspicious person who would take such precautions for a tea-party at the manse.'

'It would be quite out of the question: precautions!' Mrs. Seton cried. 'Two or three boys and girls thinking of nothing but what a bonnie waltz that is, or whose steps go best together.'

She laughed, but Mrs. Stormont did not laugh. She sat very upright in her chair, and went on with her knitting without the relaxation of a feature.

'I am thinking,' she said, after a pause, 'if I keep well, of seeing a little company myself.'

'Dear me! that will be a great pleasure to the young people to hear of.'

'Oh, I'll not enter into competition with you,' said Mrs. Stormont, coldly. 'But Philip is not just in the boy and girl category. It's for his sake that I think it's necessary to see a few of my old county friends.'

Mrs. Seton, though she was piqued, was equal to the occasion.

'That's quite a different thing, to be sure,' she said, 'from the parish. I may not be very quick in the uptake, but of course I can see that.'

'On the contrary, I would say you were very quick in the uptake,' said Mrs. Stormont; 'there is nobody but knows it. It is not the same as just the neighbours in the parish; but I need not say that the clergyman, especially when he's respected like Mr. Seton, and his family are always included.'

'That's very kind,' said Mrs. Seton. 'If it is to be soon, however, I'm afraid we will not have the pleasure; we are going to pay some summer visits, my husband and me, and I think we'll take Katie with us. It's time she were seeing a little of the world.'

'Bless me! at sixteen, what does a girl want with seeing the world?' Mrs. Stormont cried.

'There is never any telling,' said the minister's wife. 'It's sometimes a great advantage to be made to see that a parish or even a county is not all the world. But,' she added, rising with great suavity, 'if we do not see it, we'll hear about it, and I'm sure I hope it will be a great success.'

'She hopes nothing of the sort,' said Mrs. Stormont, when her visitor was gone. She lived so much alone that she would sometimes say out in very plain language, confident that nobody could hear her, the sentiments of her mind. 'She hopes nothing of the sort; she would like to hear that my cakes would not rise nor my bread bake, and that everybody was engaged.'

When, however, a little time had elapsed, and Philip's mother had recovered her temper,

she modified this expression. For Mrs. Seton was not an ill-natured woman. She liked to be first—who does not? She liked to feel herself a social personage sought by everybody. When she was neglected or threatened with neglect, she knew how to show 'a proper pride;' but she wished no harm to her neighbours or their entertainments. And at the present moment the Stormonts were very important to her. She thought she saw a proposal in Philip's eyes. Poor lady! she was not wiser than another, she was not aware it had been made and accepted. She did not know that her little Katie, whose flirtations she considered of so little consequence, was holding a secret of such importance from her. She was very quick-witted in such matters, and would have found out any other girl in a moment; but to think that Katie was deceiving her was impossible to her. She thought she had it all in her own hands; sometimes she confided her feelings to her husband, who was very helpless, and did not know anything about it.

'Things have gone just far enough,' she said to him, 'with that lad Philip Stormont—just far enough. Unless he is going to speak, he has

no business to hang about our house morning, noon, and night. He must see that we are not people to be trifled with, Robert. I am not going to put up with it if it goes too far.'

'I hope, my dear,' said the minister, with an air of distress, 'that you don't want me to interfere; I understand nothing about it. I never spoke to a man upon such a subject in my life. I really could not do it. You must not ask me to interfere.'

Mrs. Seton looked at him with a contemplative air of wondering contempt.

'Of all the frightened creatures in this world, there is nothing like a man,' she said; 'a hare is nothing to you. Interfere!—do I ever interfere with your sermons? I was silly to say a word, but there are times when a person cannot help herself, when there is just a necessity to speak to somebody. And I have not Katie to fall back upon. No, no—don't you be frightened. I hope I have more sense than to ask you to interfere.'

The minister was relieved, but still not quite easy in his mind.

'I hope nobody will do it,' he said. 'I'd like to horsewhip the fellow that behaved ill to my

Katie; but I would not say a word to him, I would——'

'Just you hold your tongue, Robert,' Mrs. Seton said. 'Am I likely to compromise Katie? Just you write your sermons, and leave the bairns to me. We are both best in our own departments.'

To which sentiment the minister yielded a silent assent. He was altogether overwhelmed with alarm at the thought of having any negotiation to manage of such a delicate kind. And Katie, after all, was a child; and women have a way of giving such exaggerated importance to everything. But he watched his wife with a little anxiety for some time after. He found her, however, when he saw them together, on the best possible terms with Philip Stormont, and he congratulated himself that the cloud had blown over, and that there would need to be no interference at all.

'Your mother tells me she's meditating some parties,' said Mrs. Seton, when she saw the young man. 'Oh, no, no, not our kind. I hope I know better than to think of that. Me, I never venture on more than a tea-party, and, though you do us the honour to come, and the

ladies from the Castle, the rest are just parish neighbours. But, so far as I understand from Mrs. Stormont, it is the whole county that is coming. Is it to be a ball? I said to your mother we would probably be away, Mr. Seton and myself, and that I thought of taking Katie; but I am not sure that I will keep to that, if it is going to be a ball.'

'I don't know anything about it,' said Philip. 'My mother thinks we should do something, as people have been so kind to me; but nobody has been so kind as you have been, and, if you are away, it must be put off till you come back —unless you send Katie——'

'My dear Mr. Philip,' said Mrs. Seton, 'it is not that I'm a punctilious person: and you have known Katie all her life: but, you see, she is now grown up, and at the first opportunity I am going to bring her *out*. Yes, I allow it is very early—sixteen and a half—but the eldest daughter, that always counts for something. And, in the family, it would be ridiculous if you called her anything but by her name; but I must ask you, before strangers, to say Miss Seton, or even Miss Katie. It's more suitable when a girl grows up.'

Philip stared with his mouth open, as well as his eyes. Nobody could say this was interfering. It was different from the brutal method which asks a man what are his intentions: but all the same he felt himself pulled suddenly up, when he was fearing nothing. He answered, faltering, that in that respect and every other he would of course do what Mrs. Seton thought right, but——

'Oh, yes,' she said, with perfect good-humour, 'of course you will do just what I please, but—I am acquainted with your buts, you young folk—you forget that I was once young myself. No, Philip, Katie is very well for the house, but it does not do for the world. What would you think in the middle of your grand party, with all the county there, as your mother says—that is, if we are asked, which I am not taking for granted——'

'There shall be no party in any house I belong to, where you are not asked the very first,' Philip said.

'Well, that is a very nice thing to say. It is just what it is becoming and nice for you to say, having been so much about our house. But what would people think, if you were to

be heard with your Katie here and Katie there in the middle of all the fine county ladies? What would they say? You see, I am obliged to think of all that.'

'I don't know what they would think,' said Philip, with what Mrs. Seton called afterwards, 'a very red face.' 'I don't know what they might say—but I know what I should tell them, if any one of them ventured——'

Mrs. Seton put up her hand to stop him. She would indeed have liked very much to hear what he would have told them, if anyone had ventured—— But, after all, she had no mind to betray him into a hasty statement. She put up her hand, and said,

'Whisht, whisht! You may be sure nobody would venture. I will tell you what they would say. They would say *that* Mrs. Seton's a silly woman not to notice that her daughter is grown up, and to make other people take notice of it too. So you see, after all, it is myself I am thinking of,' she concluded, with a laugh.

Philip retired, feeling much discomforted, after this conversation. His secret had not weighed upon him before. He meant no harm. There

was a certain enjoyment in the mystery, in the stolen meetings, and secret understanding. He did not mean anything dishonourable. But as he listened to this unexpected address, and found himself placed on the standing-ground of one who had known Katie from a child, but henceforward must learn to respect her as a young lady, a curious shame and sense of falsehood came over him. As if he were a stranger! as if he had nothing to do with her! while all the while Katie was—— All the interference in the world could not have convinced the young man like this. Was it possible that he would have to make believe; to call his betrothed by the formal name of Miss Seton? His imagination was not lively, but yet he was capable of figuring to himself his mother's party at the Tower, with Katie present amid the crowd of guests, and he, the master of the house, obliged to reserve his attentions for those who were entitled to them, and incapable of distinguishing her. Mrs. Seton had overlooked this, clear-sighted as she was. She had spoken as if the risk were that he would distinguish Katie overmuch, and rouse the surprise of all the fine people by too familiar use of her name. Alas,

if that had been all! But Philip knew better what his fate would be. He would be occupied with very different duties; his work would all be laid out for him—whom he was to dance with, to whom he was to devote his attentions. He would not be able to approach Katie, perhaps, till the end of the evening after he had paid his devoirs to all the greater people present.

Poor Philip's heart grew sick as he thus realised his position. If he could but prevail upon his mother to give up her plans!—failing that, he was obliged to confess with bitterness that it would be far better if Katie would go away visiting with her parents. He would not care for the ball were she absent, that was true; but, heaven help him! what was he to do were she present?—how explain to her that he must abandon her?—and, still more, how explain to her mother, who expected something so different? Katie might pardon for love's sake, and because of his protestations and explanations, his apparent neglect—though Katie, too, was very high-spirited, and would ill be able to brook the slight. But her mother, how could she be mollified, how brought to understand it?—she who was so confident of her own great kindness to

him and his indebtedness to her, and only afraid lest his extreme intimacy should appear too much. Poor Philip! his very soul sank within him as he anticipated his mother's party. Was it, perhaps, with some consciousness of all these promising elements of a quarrel that Mrs. Stormont's plans had been laid?

## CHAPTER VI.

BUT Mrs. Stormont was not a person whom it was easy to move from her purpose. She was a serious woman, little addicted to balls, but, when she had determined upon this frivolity, it became to her a piece of business as incumbent upon her, and to be undertaken as conscientiously, as any other duty. If she foresaw in her sober and long-sighted intelligence the embarrassment it was likely to bring into her son's relations with the Setons, this was merely by the way, and not important enough to rank with her as a motive. She glimpsed at it in passing as an auxiliary advantage rather than contemplated it as worth the trouble she was taking in itself. Her motives were distinct enough. She said to the world that her object was to return the civilities which had been paid to her son, than which nothing could be more

natural. She owned to herself another and still stronger motive, which she prepared to carry out by a visit to Murkley as soon as her project had fully shaped itself in her mind. If she could succeed in bringing out Lilias at this entertainment, and making it the occasion of her introduction into society—if, amid the gratification which this preference of his house above all the other houses of the district must give Philip, she could place before her son's eyes a young creature far more lovely than Katie, as well as more gently bred and of higher pretensions, and re-knit the old bonds of childish intimacy between them, and convince both that they were made for each other, Mrs. Stormont felt that all the trouble and the expense, which she did not like, but accepted as a dolorous necessity, would not be in vain. This was her aim, if she could but carry it out.

As she thought over the details, she felt, indeed, that the minister's family, who had given themselves the air of being Philip's chief friends, would no doubt on such an occasion find their level. Mrs. Seton, who had it all her own way in the parish, would in the society of the county be put in her right place. And as for the little

thing, who was not worth half the trouble she was likely to give, she would get her fill of dancing—for she was a good dancer, there could be no doubt on that point—but she would not have Mr. Stormont to dance attendance upon her, as no doubt she would expect. This would be a sort of inevitable revenge upon them, not absolutely intentional—indeed, beyond any power of hers to prevent—but which naturally she would have done nothing to prevent, even if she had the power. She caught sight of it, as it were, by the way, and was grimly amused and pleased. They would not like it; but what did that matter? It would let them see what was their proper place.

This, however, which to Mrs. Stormont was but one of the gratifying details of her plan, bulked much more largely in the eyes of Philip. He did the best he could to turn her from the ball altogether.

'It will be a great expense,' he said, with a face as long as his arm. 'Do you think, mother, it is really worth the while?'

'Everything is worth the while, Philip, that will put you in your proper place.'

'What is my proper place, if I am not in it

already without that? There is no more need for a ball to-day than there was a year ago.'

'Then the less I lee, when I say it's needed now,' said Mrs. Stormont, who loved a proverb. 'Being wanted a year ago, as you confess, it is indispensable by this time. I am going to begin with Murkley; they are our nearest neighbours, and the oldest family in the county. If Margaret will but bring Lilias, that of itself will be worth all the cost. The prettiest girl in the whole neighbourhood, and so much romance about her. I would dearly like if she took her first step in the world in this house, Phil. It was here she first learned to walk alone, poor bit motherless thing; and her first step was into your arms.'

Philip laughed, but the suggestion was confusing.

'I hope you don't intend that performance to be repeated now,' he said.

'I would have no objection for my part,' said his mother. 'You might go farther, and fare worse—both of you. Murkley marches with your lands, and if anything of the kind should come to pass——'

'I wish, mother, you would give up calculations of that sort.'

'I never began them,' said Mrs. Stormont, promptly. 'I say you may go farther, and fare worse. You can drive me to Murkley, if ye please, in the afternoon, and pay your respects to the ladies.'

'Can't Sandy drive you, as usual?' said her son, with a lowering brow.

'Oh, for that matter, I'm very independent. I can drive myself,' said Mrs. Stormont, who went on the safe principle of making her own arrangements.

She lamented a little over Philip's churlishness when he left the room, reminding herself how different it had been when he was a boy, with a maternal complaint which is too common to require repetition. But she was too wise a woman to be tragical on this subject. A mother, even when she has but one child, must harden herself in such matters. She rang for Sandy, and ordered her little carriage without any sentimentality.

'Will I clean myself, and go with ye, ma'am,' asked Sandy, 'or will Mr. Philip?'

'We must not depend upon Mr. Philip,' said

Mrs. Stormont, with a smile. 'Gentlemen have so many occupations. You will just be ready at three o'clock, in case I want you.'

And at three o'clock accordingly, the sturdy old pony felt in his imagination the flashing of Sandy's whip, and set off at a steady pace down the hill towards Murkley. They crossed in the big ferry-boat, to which they were all accustomed, and which the pony regarded as an every-day matter. Understanding all about the boat, probably he would have felt a bridge to be something more alarming. The day was fine, the river shining in the sun, the trees in their deepest summer wealth of shade.

'Is that the English gentleman that came over to lunch with your master?' Mrs. Stormont asked.

'I'm no that sure, mem, that he's English,' Sandy replied.

'I'm astonished that he's still about. I thought he was a tourist, or some of those cattle. What is he doing so long here?' the lady asked, peremptorily.

'He's nae fisher,' replied Sandy, with a slight shake of his head—implying at once a certain stigma upon Lewis' morals, and a deeper shade of mystery as to his object.

The young man himself was seated on the river-bank, with a sketch-book before him. He was surrounded by a group of children, however, and was evidently making very little progress with his sketch. There was a look of indolence about him which disturbed these critics.

'He's doing nothing,' said Mrs. Stormont.

'I canna make out that he ever does anything but tell the bairns stories,' said Sandy.

Such a phenomenon was rare at Murkley, where everybody had something to do. Had he been fishing, however unsuccessfully, both mistress and man would have been satisfied. But in the absence of that legitimate occupation Lewis was a vagabond, if not a semi-criminal, meditating mischief, in their eyes.

The appearance of Mrs. Stormont's carriage was very welcome at Murkley in the languor of the afternoon. Something in the sense that she 'might have been their mother' gave a softness to her manners in that place. She kissed even Margaret and Jean with a certain affectionateness, although they could not have been more than step-daughters to her in any case.

'And where is my bonnie Lily?' she said. There could not be a doubt that she loved Lilias for herself, besides all her other recommendations. She took the girl into her arms, into the warm enfolding of her heavy black-silk cloak. 'Now, let me see how you're looking,' she said, holding her at arm's length. 'My dear Margaret, we'll have to acknowledge, whether we will or not, that this bit creature is woman grown.'

'I have not grown a bit for two years,' said Lilias. 'I am more than a woman, I am getting an old woman; but Margaret will never see it.'

'And what is the news with you?' said Miss Jean.

'Well, my dears,' said Mrs. Stormont, 'I have some news, for a wonder, and I have come to get you to help me. I am going to give a party.'

Lilias uttered a soft little cry, and put out her hands towards Margaret with a gesture of appeal.

'A—ball,' said Mrs. Stormont, with deliberation, making a pause before the word.

Lilias jumped to her feet. She clapped her hands together with soft vehemence.

'Oh, Margaret, oh, Margaret!' she cried.

'That is exactly what I mean,' the elder lady said. 'I meant to have approached the subject with caution, but it's better to be bold and make a clean breast of it. That is just what it is, Margaret. You see, everybody has been very kind to Philip, yourselves included, and I want to give an entertainment, to make some little return. But I am not a millionaire, as you know, and I'm very much out of the habit of gaieties. There is just one thing my heart is set upon, and that is to have the Lily of Murkley at Philip's ball.'

There are some things that even the most judicious cannot be expected to understand, and one of them is the manner in which persons who are most important and delightful to themselves may be regarded by others. That her son was neither a hero nor a genius Mrs. Stormont was very well aware. She had said to herself long since that she had no illusions on this subject. There was nothing wonderful about him one way or another. He would no doubt turn out a respectable member of society, like his father before him. 'You are very well off when you can be sure of that; plenty of

women just as good as I am are trysted with fools or reprobates,' Mrs. Stormont said to herself: and Philip was neither the one nor the other. If he was not devoted to his mother, he had never yet gone against her or openly opposed her decisions, and with this she had learned to be content, and even to glorify herself a little, comparing her position with that of old Lady Terregles, who had been obliged for very good reasons to leave her son's house. But, reasonable as she was, there was one natural weakness which Mrs. Stormont had not got free of. It had not occurred to her that it could be anything but a recommendation of her ball to everybody about that it was Philip's ball. To say that it was for him seemed to be the way of attracting everybody's interest. She thought, in the unconscious foolishness which accompanied so much excellent sense, that there was much less likelihood of overcoming Margaret's scruples if she had claimed Lilias for her party on the ground of her own old affection: to ask this privilege for Philip's ball was the most ingratiating way she could put it. She expected with confidence the effect this statement would have upon them. Philip's ball: not for her sake

—that might not be motive enough—but to confer distinction upon Philip. Poor Mrs. Stormont! It would have been some consolation to her had she known that Philip had been the object of Margaret's chiefest alarm for a long time past. But she did not know this; and when she looked round upon the ladies and saw the blank that came over their faces, it gave her a pang such as she had not felt since the first lowering of her expectations for Philip—and that was long ago. But Lilias herself did not show any blank. The girl had begun to execute a little dance of impatience before Margaret, holding out supplicating hands.

'Oh, will you let me go? Oh, Margaret, let me go! I will be an old woman before you let me see a dance. Oh, just this once, Margaret! Oh, Jean, why don't you speak? Even if I am to go to Court, the Queen will never know. And besides, do you think she would take the trouble to find out whether the girls that are presented had ever been at a dance before? Do you think the Queen has the time for that? And she's far too kind, besides. Margaret, oh! will you let me go?'

Lilias, it is needless to say, being Scotch, was

not skilled in the management of her wills and shalls; but there were no critical ears in the little company to find her out.

'I will be sixty before I ever see a dance, and what will I care for it then?' she added, sinking into plaintive tones.

But Margaret sat behind without saying a word. It is needless to add that Miss Jean had already put on a look as suppliant as that of the petitioner herself; instead of backing up her stronger sister, she went over to the side of youth without a struggle. But Margaret sat in her big easy-chair, with her feet elevated upon a high footstool—a type of the inexorable. And, as so often happens, it was upon the innocent one of the three, she who could derive no benefit from any yielding, that she turned her thunder.

'Jean,' she cried, 'I wonder at you! How often have we consulted upon this, and made up our minds it was best for the child to keep steady to her lessons till the time and the way that we had fixed upon for the best? Has anything happened to change that? I am not aware of it. Every circumstance is just the same; but you pull at my sleeve and you cast eyes at me as if I was a tyrant not to change at

the first word. I understand Lilias, that is but a child, and thinks of nothing but diversion: but I am surprised at *you!*'

'Oh! Margaret,' Jean said, but she did not venture on anything more.

'My dear Margaret,' said Mrs. Stormont, 'I would always respect a decision that had been come to after reflection, as you say. But, dear me, after all it's not so serious a matter. If a girl had to be kept out of the world till she's presented, as Lilias says, I suppose that would be a reason. But you know better than that. And I may never live to give another dance, though you will have plenty of them, my dear, long before you are sixty. And it will never be just the same thing again for Philip. Think what friends they've been all their lives. When I think they might have been brother and sister,' she added, with a laugh, 'if I had been left to my own guiding!—and Philip has always had that feeling for her. Bless me, Lilias, if *that* had taken place, you would have been no heiress at all. So perhaps it is as well for you I am not your mother,' Mrs. Stormont said.

At this Lilias paused in the midst of her excitement to consider so curious a question. It

opened up speculations, indeed, for them all. To have had a male heir had always been supposed to be the thing upon earth which would have been most blessed for the Murrays, and the elder sisters in past years had often sighed to think how much better it would have been had Lilias been a boy. But the idea that Philip Stormont might have been that heir-male was confusing and not agreeable. They felt a sort of half resentment at the suggestion. A young man like that, who was just nobody, a mere 'long-leggit lad.' Had the long-leggit lad been their own, no doubt the sisters would have represented him to themselves as the most delightful of young heroes: for even our own detrimentals are better than the best possessions of other people. But as a supposition it did not please them. To have had no Lilias, but Philip Stormont instead! Certainly Mrs. Stormont had been unfortunate in her modes of recommending her son. The presumption of supposing it possible that Philip could ever have been a Murray was scarcely less than that of believing that carefully constructed system could be broken through in order that Lilias might go to Philip's ball. What was Philip, that they should thus meet

him upon every side? Mrs. Stormont did not quite fathom the cause of the sudden cloud which fell upon her friends. It could not, she said to herself, be her joke about Philip—that was just nonsense, she had no meaning in it. It was just one of the things that people say to keep up the conversation. But she had to retire without receiving any final answer to her proposition. She had indeed to congratulate herself that there was no final answer, for this left ground for a little hope; but, whether or not Lilias was eventually permitted to accept the invitation, Mrs. Stormont left Murkley with an uncomfortable feeling that her present visit had been a failure. She had gone wrong somehow, she could not exactly tell how. Something about Philip had jarred upon them, and she had been so anxious to present Philip under the best possible light! It was not often that she failed in making herself welcome, and the sensation was disagreeable. It was this failure, perhaps, which prompted her to tell Sandy to drive to the manse, perhaps with a slight inclination to indemnify herself, to make the people there suffer a little for the mistake she had made. She was so sure that Mrs. Seton had been injudicious

about Katie, that she felt confident in her own power of being disagreeable at a moment's notice. It was not, however, with any intention of this kind that she stopped Sandy at the garden door, and went round by that way, instead of driving formally round the little 'sweep,' and reaching in state the grand entrance. Most of the visitors of the manse entered by the garden. Had she been walking, neither she nor anyone else would have thought of any other way.

But it was an unfortunate moment. Somebody was playing the piano in the drawing-room. 'And, if that is Katie, she must have been having lessons, for I never heard her play like that before: and, no doubt, dear lessons,' Mrs. Stormont added to herself, 'though there are six of a family, aud boys that should be at college.' She was a little jaundiced where the Setons were concerned. She came up to the glass door, and tapped lightly; whereupon there was a stir in the room, not like the placid composure with which people turn their faces towards a new visitor when they have been doing nothing improper. There was a confused sound of voices: one of the younger girls came in sight from behind the piano, and advanced with a somewhat

scared face to the door which Mrs. Stormont had opened. Having thus had her suspicions fully aroused, she was scarcely surprised to see stumbling up from a chair, in a corner which retained a position of guilty proximity—noticed too late to be remedied—to another chair, her very son Philip who had already spoiled one visit to her, and of whom she believed that he was engaged in some necessary duty about the estate several miles off. Philip's face was flushed and sullen. Of all things in the world there is nothing so disagreeable as being 'caught,' and perhaps the sensation of being caught is all the more odious when you have the consciousness of doing no wrong. Katie, more rapid than her lover, was standing at the window with innocent eyes regarding the flowers. To jump up from Philip's side had been the affair of an instant with her. She came forward now, but not without a certain faltering.

'Mamma has just gone to the nursery for a moment; but I will tell her you are here,' Katie cried. As for Philip, he stood like a culprit, like a man at the bar, and frowned upon his mother.

'Oh! Philip!' she said, 'so you are here.'

'Why shouldn't I be here?' the young man

replied. He thought for the moment, with the instinct of guilt, that his mother had come on purpose to find him out.

All this time there was, as Mrs. Stormont afterwards remembered with gratitude, 'one well-bred person' in the room, which was the stranger of whom Sandy had doubted whether he were English. English or not, he was a gentleman, she afterwards concluded, for he went on playing, not noisily, as if to screen anything, but as he had been doing when she came through the garden, and asked herself could that be Katie who played so well. Lewis had perception enough to know that this unexpected arrival would not be pleasant to his friends. He, who had stumbled into their secret before without any will of his, was aware of the whispering of the lovers in the corner, which he saw out of the corner of his eye with a wistful sort of sympathy. He had put his music between himself and them to afford at once a cover to their whisperings and a shelter to himself from the sight of a happiness which he thought never would be his. When the mother came in, startled, irate, yet self-subdued, his quick sympathy perceived that this was no moment

to stop to emphasize the situation more. He had a vague perception of the half quarrel, the sullen, too ready self-defence, the surprise which was an accusation. His heart took the part of the lover as a matter of course. The old lady was jealous, ill-tempered, full of suspicions. What wonder, he thought, that Philip, out of the offensive atmosphere at home, should take refuge here?

Mrs. Seton came bustling in a moment after, full of apologies. 'I had not been out of the room a moment—not a moment. But this is always what happens. The moment you turn your back somebody appears that you would wish to have the warmest welcome. But I hope it's not too late. And I am so glad to see you, Mrs. Stormont. I hope you are not walking this warm afternoon. No, no, you must not sit down there; let me give you this comfortable chair, and I've told Katie not to wait, but to send for the tea at once. You will be all the better, after your drive, of a cup of tea.'

'I am afraid,' said Mrs. Stormont, 'that I've disturbed you all. It is a stupid thing coming in at a side door. I am sure I don't know what

tempted me to do it. Another time I will know better. I have just disturbed everybody.'

She tried not to look at Philip, but his eyes were bent upon her under cloudy brows.

'You have disturbed nobody,' cried Mrs. Seton. 'We've just been sitting doing nothing, listening to the music. Mr. Murray is so kind; he just comes in and plays when he pleases, and it is a privilege to listen to him. There is my little Jeanie sits down on her little stool by his feet, and is just lost in it. She has a great turn for music: and I am sure it makes an end of work for Katie and me—we can do nothing but listen. Play that little bit again, Mr. Murray. I really forget what you called it—the bit that begins,' and she sang a few bars in a voice that had been very good in its day. 'Let Mrs. Stormont hear that; she will understand the way you keep us all just hanging upon you. He's so unassuming,' she added, turning to the visitor, whose aspect was less sweet than the music, 'so modest, you would never know he had such a gift. But he has taken kindly to us—I'm sure I don't know why—and comes in almost every day.'

'No wonder he comes when he has such lis-

teners,' said Mrs. Stormont. 'And, Philip, are you finding out that you have a turn for music too?'

'Oh, Mr. Philip, he comes with his friend,' said Mrs. Seton. 'Listen, now, that's just delightful! I let my stocking drop—where is my stocking? Music is a thing that just carries me away. Thank you—thank you, Mr. Murray; and, dear me, Katie is so anxious not to lose anything, here she is back already with the tea.'

Katie came back with a little agitation about her, which the keen spectator observed in a moment, not without a little pang to perceive how prettily the colour came and went upon her little countenance, and how her eyes shone. Katie felt guilty, very guilty. There was a throb of pleasure in her heart to feel herself in the position of the wicked heroine. She was frightened and subdued and triumphant all at once. To see the mother watching who was suspicious, and angry, and afraid—actually afraid of Katie—made her heart beat high. She made all the haste she could to speed on the maid with the tea, under cover of whom she could go back to the arena of the struggle. It is needless to say that the music did not exercise

a very great influence over Katie. It had veiled her whispering with Philip, so that not even her mother took any notice of it. And Mrs. Seton, though she was very tolerant of a little flirtation, was not in the secret, and would have certainly stopped anything that appeared very serious in her eyes.

Now that they were all put on their guard, the fact was that Mrs. Stormont was much mystified, and unable to assure herself that she had found out anything. No one can found an accusation on the fact that a girl grows red or a young man black and lowering at her appearance. Such evidence may be quite convincing morally, but it cannot be brought forth and alleged as a reason for action.

'If there was nothing wrong, why did she blush and you look so glum?' she asked afterwards.

'I don't know what you call looking glum,' said Philip; 'perhaps it is my natural look.'

Alas! his mother was almost tempted to say, it was. For the last three months he had been often glum, easily offended. He was only a little more so when vexed. And Katie blushed very readily; she was always blushing, with

reason and without reason. The only certainty that Mrs. Stormont arrived at was that the stranger was 'a fine lad;' and she invited him to her ball on the spot, an invitation which Lewis accepted with smiling alacrity. That was all that came for the moment of Mrs. Stormont's mission to Murkley.

## CHAPTER VII.

BUT Mrs. Stormont's visit was far from being destitute of results. It caused a great many discussions and much agitation at Murkley where Lilias was in the greatest commotion all the evening, and could scarcely sleep the whole night through. If it was not necessary, as Mrs. Stormont had hinted, to be absolutely in a state of innocence, unacquainted with all balls and parties, and every sort of dissipation before the Queen would admit you to the drawing-room, why then, oh! why might not she go to Philip's ball?

'I was sure the Queen would never mind,' Lilias said. 'If it was for nothing else, she is far too kind; unless she was obliged for etiquette; and if she is not obliged——'

'Oh, my dear, the Queen is the fountain head —how could she be obliged? She is never

obliged to do this or that. Whatever she does, that is the right thing,' cried Jean, shocked by the girl's bold words. Margaret was quite as loyal, but not quite so confident. She shook her head.

'There is nobody that has a greater respect for her majesty than me: but, nevertheless, I cannot but think that there are things she has to make a point of just for the sake of good order. Mrs. Stormont is no judge—she is not in the position; her majesty would be little likely to take any trouble about small gentry of that kind; but the Murrays are not small gentry, and your mother was Lady Lilias Abernethy—that makes all the difference. You would be inquired about where an ordinary person would not, and there's an interest about a motherless girl. The Queen, who, they say, forgets nothing, will remember your mother, and that you never had that advantage; her heart will be sore for you, poor thing: and, if it comes to her ears that Lilias Murray has been seen by everybody dancing at all the small country balls and dances——'

'Now, Margaret!' cried Lilias, jumping to her feet, 'how could the Queen hear that, when it

would be only one, only one at the most?'

'One would be just the beginning,' said Miss Margaret. 'When you had been to Mrs. Stormont's ball (for it is nonsense to call it Philip's), everybody else that was going to give a dance would be after you, and they would say, with reason, if she went to the Stormonts, you cannot refuse to let her come to me; or else, if you go to no other place, worse will be said, and it will go through the country that there is Some Reason why you should go there and nowhere else.'

'Some reason!—but what reason could there be?' cried Lilias, appalled by this solemnity, and, in spite of herself, growing pale.

'They would invent some story or other,' said her sister. 'You see, there is nothing stands by itself in this world—one thing is always connected with another, so that ye can never just do a simple action without taking into account what comes after and what has gone before.'

Miss Margaret enunciated this alarming doctrine in the evening, with the light of the lamp falling upon her face and the widespread whiteness of her newspaper, and showing against the dark background the scared looks of her two

companions, one of whom listened with a gasp of alarm, while the other made a mild remonstrance.

'Margaret! you will frighten the poor thing out of her life.'

'Is it true, or is it not true?' said Margaret. 'You have lived long enough, Jean, to know. There is always,' she added, with a little sense of success which is seductive, 'a little of the next morning and the night before in every day.'

Now Lilias had a lively mind, and, though she had been struck by the first statement, this repetition took away her alarm. Her reverential attitude towards her sisters prevented her from making any demonstration, but she was no longer cowed.

'To be sure,' she said, 'in a ball you are asked ever so long before, and it is sure to last till next morning. I see now what you mean.'

'Oh, if that is all,' said Jean, relieved.

'Whether that is all or not, it is time for bed,' Miss Margaret said, which is always a good way of evading an argument with a young person. But she was somewhat severe upon her sister when they were left alone. 'Do you not see,' she said, 'that all this is just to get Lilias for

that long-leggit lad of hers? If it had been any other person, I would have consented at once; but Philip Stormont! It would be like falling into a man-trap just outside of your own gate.'

'But you were just the same, Margaret—I'm not blaming you, for I am sure you have your reasons—about the little bits of tea-parties at the manse that could harm nobody.'

'And where there was just the same danger,' said Margaret. 'Not that I would have any fear of Philip Stormont if there were others to compare with him; but, where there's nobody else, any young man would be dangerous. I want her when she goes from here to be fancy free.'

'But there will be plenty to compare with him; there will be the best in the county—for Mrs. Stormont is much respected,' said Jean. 'And even at the manse, you forget, Margaret, there was that young Mr. Murray.'

'The lad that plays the music,' said Miss Margaret, with a smile. 'I would not hurt your feelings, Jean: but a young man that has nothing better to do than play the piano——'

'Oh, Margaret!' Miss Jean said.

She was wounded by so much ignorance and prejudice. She went away softly, and lighted her candle with a sort of quiet dejection, shaking her head. A young man that had such a gift! Yet Margaret, though she scoffed at Philip as a long-leggit lad, thought more of him than of the young musician. Her own profound respect for Margaret's superior judgment made it all the harder to bear. And Miss Jean was aware that Margaret expressed the general sentiment, and that there was nobody about who would not esteem the quality of him whose highest gift was to stand up to his waist in the water catching trout, far above that of the man who drew her very soul out of her breast with such strains as she had never heard before. She could not argue in favour of the more heavenly accomplishment. How could she speak of it even, to those who were insensible to it, and Margaret, who was so much cleverer than she was? The sense of helplessness and inability to explain herself, yet of a certain humble, natural superiority, and happiness in her own understanding, filled her mind.

Margaret, whose heart had smote her for

wounding her sister, stopped her as she was going out, candle in hand.

'You must just set it down to my ignorance, if I have vexed you, Jean; and you will remember that I was ill enough pleased to see your friend (as we know nothing about him) in the company of Lilias the other day; so I'm meaning no disrespect to him.'

'He is not my friend, Margaret—any more than yours, or any person's,' said Jean, with gentle deprecation.

'I will not allow that,' said Margaret, with a smile.

It was something of an uneasy smile, between ridicule and indignation, but Jean had not the smallest conception what its meaning was. She went upstairs with her candle somewhat consoled, but yet feeling that her favourite had scant justice, and grieved that Margaret, and even Lilias, should be incapable of the pleasure which was to herself so great. Both so much more clever than she was, and yet indifferent to, almost contemptuous of, music! Miss Jean shook her head as she went up the dark oak staircase with the candle, and her shadow stalking behind her, twice as large as she, nodded

its head too, with a dislocated bend, upon the darkness of the panelled walls.

Next morning, however, Margaret astonished them all by a decision which went entirely against all the arguments of the night.

'I have been thinking,' she said, as they sat at breakfast. 'There are a great many things to be taken into account. You see, it is in our own parish, at our very doors. The horse-ferry is troublesome, but still it is a thing that is in use both day and night, and there is no danger in it.'

'Oh, no danger!' cried Jean, who divined what was coming.

'It was you I was thinking of, to make your mind easy; for you are the timorous one,' Miss Margaret said. 'Lilias there, with her eyes leaping out of her head, would wade the water rather than stay at home, and, for my part, I'm seldom afraid. So it's satisfactory, you think; there's no danger, Jean? Well! and, for another thing, if we were to refuse, it might be thought there was a reason for it. That's very likely what would be said. That there was an Inclination, or something that you and me, Jean, had occasion to fear.'

'It would never do to give anybody a chance of saying that, Margaret,' said Jean, with dismay.

'That is what I have been thinking,' Miss Margaret said.

And then Lilias jumped from her chair again, with impatience and wild excitement.

'Oh, will you speak English, Margaret, or Scots, or something that one can understand! What do you mean about Reasons and Inclinations? Is it philosophy you are talking—or is it something about the ball?'

'You are a silly thing with your balls. You don't know your steps even. You have never had any lessons since you were twelve. I am not going to a ball with a girl that will do me no credit.'

'Me—not know my steps! And, if I didn't, Katie would teach me. Oh, Margaret! will I go after all?'

And Lilias flung herself upon her sister's neck, and spilt Miss Margaret's tea in the enthusiasm of her embrace. The tea was hot, and a much less offence would have been almost capital from any other sinner; but when Margaret felt the girl's soft arms about her neck,

and received her kiss of enthusiasm, her attempt at fault-finding was very feeble.

'Bless me, child, mind, I have on a clean collar. And you'll ruin my gown: a purple gown with tea spilt upon it! Is that a way of thanking me to spoil my good clothes? There will be all the more need to take care of them, for you'll want a new frock, and all kinds of nonsense. Sit down—sit down, and eat your egg like a natural creature. And, Jean, you must just give me another cup of tea.'

'I will do that, Margaret; and, as for the dress, it will be better to write about it at once——'

'The dress is not all; there will be shoes, and gloves, and flowers, and fans, and every kind of thing. If you had waited till the right time, we would have been in London, where it is easy to fit out a princess; but I must just write to Edinburgh.'

'She is a kind of a princess in her way,' said Miss Jean, looking fondly at the young heroine.

Lilias was touched by all these tender glances, though she felt them to be natural.

'I only want a white frock,' she said, with humility. 'I want to go for fun, not for finery.'

Miss Jean nodded her head with approval.

'But there is your position that we must not forget,' she said.

'You are too innocent,' said Miss Margaret, 'you don't know the meaning of words. You shall just have a white frock. What do you think you could wear else?—black velvet, perhaps, because of your position, as Jean says? But there are different kinds of white frocks. One kind like Katie Seton's, which is very suitable to her father's daughter, and another—for Lilias Murray of Murkley. You may trust that to me. But it's a fortnight off, this grand ball, and if I hear another word about it betwixt this and then, or find it getting into your head when you should be thinking of Queen Elizabeth——'

'I will think of nothing but Queen Elizabeth,' cried Lilias, clasping her hands with all the fervour of a confession of faith. And she kept her word. But, nevertheless, when Miss Jean was taking her little stroll in the Ghost's Walk, in the hush of noon, when studies were over and Margaret busy with her account-books, she felt a sudden waft of air and movement, a soft breeze of youth blowing, an arm wound round her waist.

'Oh! Jean,' cried a soft voice in her ear, 'will it come true?'

'My darling, why should it not come true? It is just the most natural thing in the world. I am never myself against a little pleasure; but Margaret has always,' said Miss Jean, with a little solemnity, 'your interest at heart.'

'And you too, Jean—and you too!'

'But I am silly,' said Miss Jean. 'I would not have the heart to go against whatever you wanted. I am just a weak-minded creature. The moment you wish for anything, that is just enough for me. But you have a great deal of sense, Lilias, and you can see that would never do. Now Margaret takes everything into consideration, and she has the true love to deny you when it is needful—that is true love,' Jean said, with moisture in her eyes.

Lilias, who was responsive to every touch of emotion, acknowledged this with such enthusiasm as delighted her sister.

'But it is far nicer when she is not always thinking of my best interests. It is delightful to be going!' she cried. 'You have been at a hundred balls, and you know how to behave. Tell me what I am to do.'

This appeal was embarrassing to Miss Jean, who, indeed, had not been at a ball for a great many years, and understood that things were greatly changed since her day. For one thing, waltzes were looked but coldly on in those past times, and now she understood they were all the vogue. Jean was far too delicate in mind to suggest to her little sister that the waltz had been considered indelicate in her own day. It was the fashion now, and to put such a thought into a young creature's head, she said to herself, was what nobody should do. But she said, with a little faltering,

'What you are to do? But, Lilias, it is very hard to answer that. The gentlemen will come and ask you to dance, and all you have to do is just to——'

'To choose,' said Lilias. 'I know as much as that.'

'Yes,' said Jean, a little doubtfully, 'I suppose you may say you have to choose; but you would not like to hurt a gentleman's feelings by giving him a refusal. I don't think that is ever done, my dear. You will just make them a curtsey, and give them a smile, and they will write down their name upon a card.'

'What! everybody that asks?' cried Lilias, 'whether I like them or not?' and her face clouded over. 'There will be sure to be some that are disagreeable, and there are some, Katie says, that cannot dance. Will I be obliged to curtsey to them, and smile too? But I will not do it,' Lilias said, with a pout. 'I do not see the good of going to a ball if it is like that.'

'It is not just perfection, no more than other things,' said Jean; 'but most of the young men will, no doubt, be very nice, and you would not like to hurt their feelings.'

Upon this Lilias pondered for some moments, with a countenance somewhat overcast.

'It is always said that a lady has to choose,' she said; 'but if it is only to say yes whoever asks you——'

Jean shook her head. She could not resist the chance of a little moralizing.

'My dear,' she said, 'with the most of women, I'm sorry, sorry to say it, it comes to very little more.'

Lilias looked at her old sister with keen, unbelieving eyes. She ran over in her mind, in spite of herself, all that is said of old maids in

books, and even in such simple talk as she had heard; her mind revolted against it, yet she could not forget it. She wondered in her heart whether this might account for so strange a version of the prerogative of women. She did not believe Jean's report. She raised her fair head in the air with a little fling of pride and power. She was not disposed to give up that stronghold of feminine imagination. A girl must have something to believe in to make her confront with composure the position that is allotted to her. If she is to give up all active power of choice, she must at least have faith that the passive one, the privilege of refusal, is still to be hers. She thought that Jean, in her old maidenhood, in her sense, perhaps, of failure or inacquaintance with the ways of more fortunate women, must be mistaken in her judgment. That she herself, Lilias, should have no greater lot in the world than to sit and smile, and accept whatever might be offered to her, was a conception too humbling. She smiled, not believing it. Jean was good, she was unspotted from the world, but perhaps her very excellence made her slow of understanding. Lilias concluded her thoughts on the subject by

giving her old sister a compassionate, caressing look.

'It is you that never would hurt anybody's feelings,' she said. But she did not ask any more questions. She concluded that it would be better, perhaps, on the whole, to trust to instinct and her own perception of the circumstances as they occurred. And then there was always Katie to fall back upon—a young person of much more immediate experience and practical knowledge than could be expected from Jean.

Miss Jean was conscious on her side that she had not satisfied the girl's curiosity, or given the right answer—the answer that was expected of her—and this troubled her much; for she said to herself, 'Where is she to get understanding if not from Margaret or me?' Her first idea was to refer Lilias with humility to Margaret, but in this she paused, reflecting that Margaret had never 'troubled her head' with such matters, that she had always been a masterful woman that took her own way, and preferred the management of the house and the estate to any sort of traffic with gentlemen or other frivolous persons. Margaret, then, perhaps, after all, would

in this respect be a less qualified guide than herself, though it was a long time since she had entered into anything of the kind. And Jean, besides her tremulous eagerness to direct Lilias so that as much of the pleasure and as little of the pains that are involved in life should come to her as possibly could be, was not without a natural desire to teach and convey the fruits of her experience into another mind. She walked along in silence for a short time, and then she resumed the broken thread of her discourse.

'My dear,' she said, 'you may think my ways of knowing are small: and that is true, for Margaret and me have had none of the experiences of married women, or of the manners of men, and the commerce of the world. But you always learn something just by looking on at life, and, indeed, they say that the spectators sometimes see the game better than those who are playing at it. But there is just the danger, you know, that when we say what we've seen, it may be discouraging to a young creature who is just upon the beginning of life, and thinks all the world (which is natural) at her feet.'

'I am sure,' said Lilias, half offended, 'I don't think all the world at my feet.'

'When I was like you,' said Jean, 'I thought it was all before me to pick and choose, but you see that little has come of it: and many a girl has thought like me. It is very difficult not to think so when you start out upon the road with everything flattering, and the sun shining, and the heart in your bosom just as lightsome as a bird.'

'Am I like that?' said Lilias, half to herself, and a conscious smile came upon her face. She was conscious of herself for the moment, of the lightness with which she was walking, the ease, the freedom, the easily diverted mind, the happy constitution of everything. She had no thought of her own beauty, or any special excellence in herself, for her mind had been rather directed to the wholesome consideration of her defects than of her advantages; but as she walked there, all young and light by her elderly sister's side, for the first time that conscious possession of the world and heirship of all that was in it became apparent to her. She felt like a young queen; everything in it was hers to possess, all the beauty of it and the pleasure—indeed, it was all in her, in the power she had to enjoy, to see, and hear, and admire, and love: her

young fresh faculties all at their keenest—these were her kingdom. She could not help feeling it. It came over her in a sudden rush of sweetness and perception.

'Perhaps it is so—I never thought of it before,' she said.

'Ah, but it is so, Lilias; and I hope, my darling, you will have your day, and get the good of it; none of us have more than our day. It is not a thing that will last.'

To this Lilias answered only with a smile. She was not afraid either of not having her day, or that it would not last. She required to look forward to no future. The present to her was endless; it extended into the light on either hand. It was as good as an eternity. She smiled, confident, in the face of Fate. Jean, walking beside her with her faded sweetness and no expectation any longer in her life, did not affect in the smallest degree the mind of her younger sister. Jean was Jean, and Lilias Lilias. How the one could develop out of the other, how the warm stream of living in herself could ever fall low and faint, and trickle in a quiet stream like that of her sister, she was all unable to understand. She smiled

at the impossibility as it presented itself to her, but neither of that, nor of any failure in her opportunities of enjoyment, had she any fear.

[illegible]

[illegible] his way. [illegible] mind, and [illegible] you forget.'

[illegible] and you have [illegible] whatever you [illegible] with indignation and [illegible]

[illegible] gentleman would think. [illegible] said Kate. '[illegible] is a thing [illegible] would make him wild. [illegible] understand. He would [illegible] He would not believe his [illegible] would think it was your ignorance.

And the others would all take his part; they would say they would not expose themselves to such an insult. Nobody would ask you again.'

'As for that, it is little I would care,' cried Lilias, throwing her head back. 'It is as much an insult to a girl when they pass her by and don't ask her; and must she never give it them back? They have their choice, but we have none.'

'Oh, yes,' said Katie, 'it is easy to say, what would I care? But when the time comes, and you sit through the whole evening and see everybody else dancing——'

At this Lilias gave her little friend a look of astonishment and disdainful indignation, which frightened Katie, though she could not understand it. No one could be more humble-minded, less disposed to stand upon her superiority. But yet that superiority was undoubted, and the idea that Lilias Murray of Murkley could sit neglected had a ludicrous impossibility which it was inconceivable that anyone could overlook. Had a little maid-of-honour ventured to say this to a princess, it could not have been more out of character. The princess naturally

would not condescend to say anything of that impossibility to the little person who showed so much ignorance, but it would be scarcely possible to refrain from a glance. Lilias ended, however, so ridiculous was it, by a laugh, though still holding her head high.

'If that is the case, it must be better not to go to balls,' she said. 'For to think that a gentlewoman is to be at the mercy of whoever offers——'

'Oh, but, Lilias, I never said you couldn't give him the slip!' cried Katie, who did not know what she had said that was wrong. 'Or, if your mind is made up against any gentleman, you can always say to the lady of the house, "Don't introduce so-and-so, or so-and-so.'

'I was not thinking of myself,' said Lilias, almost haughtily. 'But, if a girl is asked,' she added, after a pause, 'what does that mean, if she may not refuse? The gentleman has his choice; he need not ask her unless he pleases—but she—she must not have any choice—she must just take everybody that comes! one the same as another, as if she were blind, or deaf, or stupid!'

'Oh, Lilias!—but I never said it was so bad

as that! And when I tell you that you can always find a way to throw them over. You can say you're tired, or that you made a mistake, and were engaged before they asked you; or you can keep your last partner, and make him throw over his, which is the easiest way of all—but there are dozens of ways——'

'By cheating!' said Lilias, with lofty indignation. 'So Jean was right, after all,' she said, 'and I am the silly one! I never believed that ladies were treated like that—even when they are young, even when——'

Here Lilias paused, feeling how ungenerous was the argument, as only high-spirited girls do.

'If gentlemen were what it seems to mean,' she said, with her eyes flashing, 'it would not be only when ladies are young and—it would not be only *then* they would give that regard to them! And it should be scorn to a man to pass by any girl, and so let her know he will not choose to ask her, unless she has a right to turn too, and refuse him!'

'Oh, Lilias, that is just nonsense, nobody thinks of that,' said Katie. 'If you take a little trouble, you need never dance with a man you don't like. If you see him coming,

you can always get out of the way, and be talking to somebody else; or say your card's full, or that you're afraid you will be away before then—or a hundred things. But to say No!—it would be so ill-bred. And then the gentlemen would all be so astonished, they would not expose themselves to such a thing as that. Not one would ever ask you again.'

'That is what we shall see!' said Lilias.

Katie was so truly distressed by a resolution so audacious and so suicidal that she spent half the afternoon in an endeavour to persuade her friend against it. She even cried over Lilias' perversity.

'What would you say?' she asked. 'Oh, you could not—you could not be so silly! They will just think it is your ignorance. They will say you are so bashful, or even that you are *gauche*.'

Katie was not very clear what *gauche* meant, and the word had all the more terrors for her. The girls were walking in the Castle park, between New Murkley and Old Murkley, when this conversation went on. It was a way that was free to wayfarers, but the passers-by were very few. And Margaret had loosened a little

her restrictions upon Lilias since the memorable decision about the Stormont ball had been come to. What was the use of watching over her so jealously, wrapping her up in blue veils, and keeping her from sight of, or converse with, the world, when in a little while she was to be permitted a glimpse of the very vortex, the whirlpool of dissipation—a ball? The blue veil accordingly was thrown back, and floated over the girl's shoulders, making a dark background to her dazzling fairness, her light locks, and lovely colour. And both form and face profited by the stir of indignation, the visionary anger and scorn which threw her head high, and inspired her step. These were the very circumstances in which the lover should appear: here were the heroine and the confidant, the two different types of women, not the dark and fair only (though Katie was not dark, but brown, hazel-eyed, and chestnut-haired), but the matter-of-fact and the poëtic, the visionary and the woman of the world. And opportunities such as these are not of the kind that are generally neglected. It was no accident indeed that brought Philip by the little gate that opened from the manse garden into

the path in which he knew he should find Katie. And perhaps it was not exactly accident which led to the discovery of Lewis when they neared the end of their walk, the great white mass of New Murkley—about which the young man was wandering, as he so often was, thinking many an undivined thought. He was there so often that, had anyone thought on the subject, it might have been with the express object of finding him that the party strayed that way; but Lilias, at least, was entirely innocent of either knowledge or calculation, so that, so far as she was concerned, it was pure accident. He was walking with his back to them, gazing up at the eyeless sockets of the windows, when they came in sight. Lilias had been reduced to an embarrassed silence since the appearance of Philip. Her knowledge of their secret overwhelmed her in their presence. She thought they must be embarrassed too. She thought they must wish to get rid of her. She had not the least idea that to both these young persons she was a defence and protection, under cover of which they could enjoy each other's company, yet confront the world. While

they talked undaunted—or rather, while Katie talked, for Philip was of a silent nature—Lilias walked softly on, on the other side, getting as far apart as she dared, drooping her head, wondering what opportunity there might be to steal away. She was not displeased, but somewhat startled at the outcry of pleasure Katie made on perceiving the other—the fourth who made the group complete.

'Oh, Mr. Murray—there is Mr. Murray; but I might have known it, for he is always about New Murkley,' Katie cried. And Lewis turned round with friendly looks, which glowed into wondering delight when he saw the shyer figure lingering a little behind, the blue veil thrown back. Just thus, attended by her faithful guardians, he had seen her first. He recollected every circumstance in a moment, as his eyes went beyond Katie to her companion in the background. He remembered how Miss Margaret had stepped forth to the rescue; how he had been marched away, and his thoughts led to other matters. He had but just glimpsed then, and he had not comprehended, that type of beautiful youth in the shadow of the past. He had asked himself since how it was possible

that he had passed it over? It had been like a picture seen for an instant. When he saw her now again, he felt like a man who has dreamed of some happiness, and awoke to find that he had lost it: but the dream had returned, and this time he should not lose it. He received, with smiling delight, the salutations of Katie, who hailed him from afar, and stood with his hat in his hand, while Lilias responded shyly but brightly to his greeting. She was pleased too. It was deliverance to her from the restraint which she felt she was imposing upon the lovers. And the friendly countenance of the stranger, and his confused looks, and the aspect of Jean at her own appearance before him, and of Margaret when he followed her into the dining-room, had created an atmosphere of amusement and interest round him. It had been all fun that previous meeting, the most delightful break in the every-day monotony. This made it agreeable to Lilias, without any other motive, that she should see Lewis again. She dared not laugh with him over it, for she did not know him sufficiently, nor would she have laughed at anything which involved Jean and Margaret in the faintest derision; but the

sense of this amusement past, and the secret laughter it had given her, made the sight of him very pleasant. And then he was pleasant; not in the least handsome—unworthy a second glance so far as that went—totally unseductive to the imagination—so entirely different from the *beau chevalier*, six feet two, with those dark eyes and waving locks, who some time or other was to appear out of the unseen for Lilias. Never at any time could it be possible that so undistinguished a figure as that of Lewis should take the central place in her visionary world; but he had already found a little corner there. He was like, she thought, the brother she ought to have had. The hero whose mission it was to save her life, to be rewarded by her love, stood worlds above any such intruder; but this beaming, friendly countenance had come in as a symbol of kindness. Lilias had perceived at once by instinct that he and she could be friends.

'Lilias,' cried Katie, 'you must talk to him about Murkley. He is always here. I think he comes both night and day. You ought to find out what he means, if he has seen a ghost, or what it is. And you are fond of it too.'

Lilias looked with a little surprise at the

stranger. Why should he care for Murkley?

'You think it is strange to see such a great big desolate house in such a place.'

'I think—a great many things that I do not know how to put into words: for my English, perhaps, is not so good——'

'Are you a German, Mr. Murray?' asked Lilias, shyly.

The end of the other two was attained; they had turned aside into the woods, by that path which led down to the old quarry and the river-side, the scene of so many meetings. Lilias had no resource but to follow, though with a sense of adventure and possible wrong-doing. She was relieved that Katie and Philip were at last free to talk as they pleased, and she was not at all alarmed by her own companion; still the thought of what Margaret might say gave her a little thrill, half painful, half pleasant.

'I am English,' said Lewis; 'yes, true English, though no one will believe me—otherwise I am of no country, for I have lived in one as much as another. I have a great interest in Murkley. If it were ever completed, it would be very noble; it would be a house to entertain princes in.'

'That is what I think sometimes,' said Lilias; 'but, then, it will never be completed. All the country knows our story. We are poor, far too poor. And, even if it were finished, it would need, Margaret says, an army of servants, and to furnish it would take a fortune. So it would be long, long before we arrived at the princes.' She ended with a laugh, which, in its turn, ended with a sigh.

'But you—would like to do it?—that would amuse you——'

'Oh! amuse me! It would not be amusement. It would be grand to do it! They say it would be finer than Taymouth. Did you ever hear that?'

'It is like the Louvre,' said Lewis, 'and that was built for a great king's palace. It is like the ghost, not of a person, but of an age. I think your ancestors must come and walk about and inspect it all, and hold solemn councils.'

'But my ancestors knew nothing about it,' said Lilias. 'Oh! not that; if they come it will be to make remarks, and say how silly grandpapa was. If ghosts are like people, that is what they will be saying, and that they knew what it would end in all along, but he never

would pay any attention. I hope he never comes himself, or he would hear—he would hear,' cried Lilias, laughing, 'what Margaret calls a few truths.'

'Do you think he was—silly?' Lewis asked. What right had he to be so *emotionné*, to feel the moisture in his eyes and his voice tremble? What could she think of him if she perceived this? She would think it was affectation, and that he was making believe.

'I think I am silly too,' Lilias said. She would not commit herself. She had heard a great deal about the old Sir Patrick, and she was aware that he had disinherited her; but he, too, was, in her imagination a shadowy, great figure, of whom something mysterious might yet be heard, for all Lilias knew. Strange stories had been told about him. He had dabbled in black acts. He had done a great many strange things in his life. Perhaps even now a mysterious packet might arrive some day, a new will be found, or some late movement of repentance. He might even step out from behind a tree in the Ghost's Walk, or out of a dark corner in the library, and explain with a dead voice, sounding far off, what he had done and why. This suppressed imagi-

nation made Lilias always charitable to him. Or perhaps she was moved by a kind of fascination and sympathy for one who had made his imagination into something palpable, and built castles in stone as she had done in dreams.

Lewis looked at her very wistfully.

'The princes you entertained would be noble ones,' he said, 'not only princes for show.'

'Oh, how do you know, Mr. Murray? Do you think I am such a—fool? Well! it would be like a fool to dream of that, when there is next to no money at all; you might forgive a child for being so silly, but a woman grown up, a person that ought to know better——'

He kept looking at her, with a little moisture in his eyes.

'I wish I were a magician,' he said; and then, with one of his outbursts of confidence, which, having no previous clue to guide them, nobody understood—'What it would have been,' he said, clasping his hands together, 'if I had come here two years ago!'

Lilias looked at him with extreme surprise. She thought he had suddenly grown tired, as people so often do, of discussing the desires of

others, and had plunged back thus abruptly into his own.

'If you had come here?' she said, with a little wonder. 'Has Murkley, then, something to do with you too?'

He did not make her any reply; but, after a while, said, faltering slightly,

'I hope that—Miss Jean—is well. I hope it is not presumption, too much familiarity, to call her so.'

'Oh, everybody calls her Miss Jean,' said Lilias. 'There is no over-familiarity. She is so happy with your music; she plays it half the day, and then she says she is not worthy to play it, that she is not fit to be listened to after you.'

'I think,' said Lewis, 'that there can be no music that she is not worthy to play, not if it were the angel-music straight out of heaven.'

'And did you see that, so little as you have known of her?' cried Lilias, gratefully. 'Ah, then I can see what she finds in you, for you must be one that can understand. Do you know what Margaret says of Jean?—that she is unspotted from the world.'

'And it is true.'

The countenance of Lewis grew very serious as he spoke; all its lines settled down into a fixed gravity, yet tenderness. Lilias was altogether bewildered by this expression. He took Jean's praises far too much to heart for a stranger, yet as if they gave him more sadness than pleasure. Why should he be sad because Jean was good? An inclination to laugh came over her, and yet it was cruel to laugh at anything so serious as his face.

'And she has had her patience so tried—oh! dear Jean, how she has had her patience tried, her and Margaret, with me—me to bring up! I have been such a handful.'

Lewis was taken entirely by surprise by this leap from grave to gay. He was taken, as it were, with the tear in his eye, his own mind bent on the solemnest of matters, and she knowing nothing, amused by that too serious aspect, made fun of him openly, turning his pensiveness into laughter! He looked at her almost with alarm, and then he smiled, but went no further.

'It is that he will not laugh at Jean—no, nor anything about her; and what a thing am I to do it!' Lilias cried out within herself, with a revulsion as sudden into self-disgust. And then

they both became very grave, and walked along by each other's side in tremendous solemnity, neither saying a word.

'Are you, too, so fond of music?' Lewis asked at length.

Lilias gave him a half-comic look, and put her hands together with a little petition for tolerance.

'It is not my fault,' she said, softly. 'I have not had time to understand.'

Her penitence, her appeal, her odd whisper of excuse disarmed Lewis. His solemnity fled away; he forgot that he was to his own thinking the grave and faithful partner of Miss Jean, assuring himself that he had got in her the noblest woman, and pushing all lighter thoughts aside: and became once more a light-hearted youth by the side of a light-hearted girl in a world all full of love, and mirth, and joyfulness. He laughed and she laughed in the sudden pleasure of this new-found harmony.

'You do not care for it,' he said; 'you like it to make you dance, not otherwise.'

In cold blood this state of mind would have horrified Lewis—in his present condition it seemed a grace the more, a delightful foolish-

ness and ignorance, a defect which was beautiful and sweet.

'I think I should care if I knew better,' said Lilias, trying on her part to approach him a little from her side, partly in sympathy, partly in shame of her own imperfection. 'And as for dancing,' she said, quickly seizing the first means of escape, 'I know nothing about it. I have never been at one—I am going to one in a fortnight.'

'And so am I,' Lewis said.

'I am very glad; but you are different, no doubt. You have lived abroad, where they are always dancing. They have different customs, perhaps, there. It was not intended that I should go to any in the country. We are to spend the next season in London. But I was so silly (I told you I was silly) that I insisted to go, thinking it would be delightful. I don't at all wish to go now,' said Lilias, drawing herself up with great dignity.

Lewis had been following all she said with so much devotion that he felt himself suddenly arrested too by this stop in the current of her feelings.

'Is it permitted to ask why?' he said. 'I hope not because I am to be there?'

Lilias paused for a moment uncertain; then, 'I am glad you are to be there, and I hope that we shall dance together,' she said, making him a beautiful, gracious little bow like that of a princess, in her grace and favour according him the boon which he had not yet ventured to ask.

Lewis' hat was off in a moment, and his acknowledgments made with enthusiasm. He thought it the most beautiful and charming departure from the conventional, while she on her side thought it the most natural thing in the world. But at this moment the others turned back upon them in a tempest of laughter. Katie had recounted their recent conversation to Philip, and Philip had received it with all the amusement which became the occasion.

'Lilias,' Katie cried, 'Philip says he will be frightened to go to his own ball. If you say no to him, he will just sink down through the floor.'

'You will never be so hard upon us as all that,' said Philip, not quite so bold when he looked at her, but yet with another laugh.

Lilias blushed scarlet; the idea of ridicule was terrible to her as to all young creatures. She looked at them with mingled shame and pride and disdain and fear. Could there be anything

more terrible than to be absurd, to be laughed at? She could not speak for a choking in her throat. And Lewis, who had not yet had time to replace his hat upon his head, or to come down to an ordinary level out of his enthusiasm of admiration and pleasure, felt Katie's quick eye upon him, and was discomfited too. But love (if it was love, alas!) sharpened his wits.

'It is a pity,' he said, 'that I do not understand the pleasantry, that I might laugh too. A stranger is what you call left out in the cold when you make allusions which are local. Pardon me if I do not understand. You are going to the river and the high-road?'

'Oh, not me!' cried Lilias. 'Katie, you know I must not go this way; I meant to say so at once, but I did not like to disturb you. Good-bye. I can run home by myself.'

'We are all coming,' Katie said, somewhat sullenly. She had not meant any harm. A joke against Lilias was no more than a joke against anyone else. One must have one's fun, was Katie's principle. But she was not aware of having done anything to call forth that violent and painful blush. Her own confidences were scarcely intended to be sacred, and she

did not know the difference between her own easy-going readiness to take and give and the sensitive withdrawal of the other girl, who knew nothing about the noisy criticism of a family. She had intended to make use of the protection afforded by the presence of Lilias, to wander about all the summer afternoon in the woods, and be happy. Why Lewis should have interfered she could not tell. Could he not be happy too without meddling with other folk? Katie turned unwillingly and accompanied her friend along the unsheltered carriage road through the park towards the old castle.

'He had his hat off,' she whispered to Philip. 'Does he think she's a grand duchess, and that he must speak to her that way? They are just alike with their old-fashioned ways—or, at least, she is high-flown and he is foreign. But don't you tell anybody *that*, for you see she is angry. She did not mean me to tell it. She will be awfully angry if it goes further. I never thought of that; but, if you tell, I will never speak to you again.'

'Toot! it is too good to keep,' cried Philip. 'There are just two or three fellows——'

'If you tell one of them,' cried Katie, exas-

perated, 'I will never, never—and you know I keep my word—speak to you again!'

While she thus made up for her inadvertent fault, Lewis walked slowly, and with a certain solemnity, by Lilias' side towards Murkley. He was suddenly stilled and calmed out of his excitement by the mere act of turning towards the old castle. He said, in a subdued voice, 'I will go, if you will permit me, and pay my respects to Miss Jean. It is possible that she might wish for a little music:' which he said with a sigh, feeling in his heart that it was necessary to crush this dangerous sentiment in his heart, to flee from the dangerous bliss and elation that had filled his soul, and to establish himself steadily beyond any doubt in his more sober fate.

## CHAPTER IX.

THEY walked together very quietly towards the old house. The sound of the voices of Philip and Katie behind them seemed to save them from the embarrassment of saying nothing, and it seemed to Lilias that it was a very friendly silence in which they moved along. The fierceness of her anger died away from her, though she was still annoyed that Katie should have betrayed her, and Lilias felt a sort of repose and ease in the quietness of the young man by her side, who seemed, she thought, instinctively to respect her sentiment. She gave him credit for a sort of divination. She said to herself that she had known he would be kind, that he had such a friendly face, just like a brother. When they reached the door, she turned round to the others, saying good-bye, to the discomfiture of both;

for Katie had promised her mother to have no meetings with Philip, and Philip knew that were he seen with Katie his reception at home would not be cordial. But Lilias confined herself to this little demonstration of displeasure, and allowed her little friend to follow her into the coolness of the old hall, which was so strange a contrast to the blaze of afternoon sunshine out of which they had come. Lilias led Lewis across to the drawing-room door. She gave him a smiling look to bid him follow her.

'I think Jean is here,' she said; then added, softly, 'I would come, too, to hear the music, but I must speak to Katie; and two of us would disturb Jean. It will make her more happy if she has it to herself.'

Lewis did not make any reply. All the smiling had gone out of his face. He was glad to be allowed to go alone. He said to himself that he would have no more trifling, that it was unworthy of the lady whom he was approaching that he should go to her with regrets. He had no right to have any regrets, and their existence was a wrong to her. It might be that the vocabulary of pas-

sion was unnecessary at her calm and serious age, but the most tender respect and devotion she was well worthy of. It would be a wickedness to go to her with any other feeling. Lewis rose superior to himself as he went across the hall by the side of that wonderful creature, who had for the moment transported him out of himself. Let all that be over for ever. He did not even look at her, but composed his mind to what was before him, feeling a sudden calm and strength in the determination to postpone it no longer. Lilias even, all unsuspicious as she was, felt somehow the gravity that had come over him, which awakened again a little laughing mischief in her mind. Was it the music, or was it Jean that made him so serious? but she restrained the jibe that came to her lips.

Miss Jean was seated, as usual, in one corner of the large room, within the niche of a deeply recessed window, with her table, her silks, her piece of work. It was not yet the hour when Margaret retired from the manifold businesses that employed her. Margaret was not only housekeeper and instructress. She was the factor, the manager of the small estate, the

farm, everything in one; and the universal occupation of Margaret had left the more passive sister time to grow ripe in the patience and sweetness of her less important rôle.

'Jean, here is Mr. Murray,' said Lilias, at the door.

She held it open for him, and stood smiling by as he passed in, watching the eagerness with which Jean rose to her feet, her little entanglement in her work, and startled anxiety to welcome her visitor.

'Oh, but I am glad to see you,' Miss Jean said, holding out her hand. 'I was afraid you had gone away—and left all that grand music. I was saying to-day where should I send it after you—but Margaret said you would never go without saying good-bye.'

'I hope you did not think I could,' said Lewis.

She smiled upon him with an indulgent look of kindness.

'I am aware,' she said, 'that young men will sometimes put off things—and sometimes forget. But I am very glad to see you, Mr. Murray. And have you had success in your fishing? But, now I remember, it was not for the fishing

you were here—and, dear me, now it comes back upon me—you were thinking of settling near Murkley?'

Was it mere imagination that her voice was a little hurried and her manner confused? He thought so, and that she had felt the difference between the fervour of what he had said to her on his last visit and the interval he had allowed to elapse before repeating it. As a matter of fact, Miss Jean had never remarked the fervour, or had not taken it as having any connection with herself.

'I said then that it would much depend on you,' he said.

'On the neighbours, and a friendly welcome —but you are sure of that,' said Miss Jean. 'Nobody but will be glad to see you. I give great weight myself to the opinion of a whole neighbourhood. It is not easy to deceive— and there is nobody but what is pleased to hear that you will stay among us.'

'That was not what I meant,' Lewis said; and then he made a pause of *recueillement* of serious preparation, that it might be made apparent how much in earnest he was.

But Miss Jean did not understand this: and

though she was far too polite to suggest that, as music was his chief standing ground, he might as well proceed to that without further preliminary, yet she could not prevent her eyes from straying towards the piano, with a look which she was afterwards shocked to think was too significant. He caught it and answered it with a grave smile.

'After,' he said, 'as much as you please, as long as you will listen to me; but there is now something else which I would say first, if I may.'

'Indeed,' cried Miss Jean, anxiously, 'you must not think me so ill-bred and unkind. If you are not in the mood for it, I would not have you think of the music. I am very glad to see you,' she added, lifting her soft eyes to him, 'if you should never touch a note. You must not think I am a person like that, always trying what I can get—no, no, you must not think that.'

'I think you,' said Lewis, with a subdued and grave enthusiasm, 'one of the most beautiful spirits in the world.'

Miss Jean looked up with a little start of amazement. She looked at him, and in her

surprise blushed, rather with pleasure than with shamefacedness. Nothing could be further from her mind than any notion that this was the speech of a lover. She shook her head.

'It is very kind and very bonnie of you to say that. I am fond that young folk should like my company. It is just one of my weaknesses. You would not think *that*, perhaps, if you knew me better; but I'm pleased—pleased to be so well thought of, not because I think it is true, but because—well, just because it is pleasant, I suppose; and then it is fine of a young lad like you to be so kind,' said Miss Jean, smiling upon him with a tender approval.

Lewis had heart enough to understand this most delicate of all the pleasures of being beloved, this approbation and sense of moral beauty in an affection so disinterested, which filled Miss Jean's virginal soul with sweetness. Her eyes caressed him as his mother's eyes might have done, for a mother, too, is doubly happy in the love bestowed upon her because it is so good, so fine, so seemly in her children. Lewis understood it, but not at this moment. There was in him something of the feeling of a desperate adventurer and something of a mar-

tyr, and the curious excitement in his veins gradually rendered him incapable of perceiving anything but his own purpose, and such response to it as he might obtain.

'That is not what I mean,' he said, clearing his throat, for his voice had become husky. 'It is not anything good in me. It is that I think you the best, the most good and sweet. I have known no one like you,' he added, with fervour. Of all things that he had encountered in the world, it seemed the most difficult to Lewis to make this proposal, and to speak of something that could be called love to this soft-eyed woman, looking at him with tender confidence, as if she had been his mother. How was he to make her understand? It was he who was red and embarrassed, not she, who suspected nothing, who had no idea in her mind of any such possibility. Her smile turned into a gentle laugh as she listened quite attentively and seriously to what he said. She shook her head, and put up her hand in gentle deprecation.

'No, no,' she said, 'you must not go too far. I will take a little flattering from you on the ground that it's friendship and your good heart, but you must not give me too much, for that

would be nonsense. But since you like me (which gives me so much pleasure), I will be bold with you, and bid you just play me something,' said Miss Jean, 'for I think you are a little put about, and there is nothing like music to set the heart right; and afterwards you will tell me what the trouble is.'

'It is no trouble,' he said. 'You look at me so sweetly—will you not understand me? I am quite lonely—I have nobody to care for me—and when I came here and saw you, it seemed to me that I was getting into a haven. But you will not understand! I am of far too little account, not worth your thinking of,' cried Lewis—'too trifling, too young, if I must say it; but if you could care a little for me, and give me a right to love you and serve you, it would make me too happy,' he said, his voice faltering, his susceptible soul fully entering into and feeling the emotion he expressed; 'and if it would give you any pleasure to be the cause of that, and to have somebody near you who loved you truly, who would do anything in the world to please you——'

Miss Jean sat gazing at him with a bewildered face. Sudden lights seemed to break over

it from time to time, then disappeared in the blank of wonder and incredulity. She was giving her mind to it with amazement, with interest, with a kind of consternation, trying to make out what he meant. One moment there was a panic in her face, which, however, gave place to the faint wavering of a smile, as if she represented to herself the impossibility of any meaning that could alarm her. Her attention was so absorbed in trying to find out what it was that, when his voice ceased, she made no effort to reply. She drew a long breath, as people who have been listening to an orator do when he comes to a pause; but she was so unable to comprehend what he could be aiming at that she was incapable of speech.

'I would live where you pleased,' said Lewis; 'I should do what you pleased. I know enough to fulfil all your wishes, there could be no failure in that. There is no worthiness in me, and perhaps you will think me unsuitable, a nobody, too young, too unimportant, that is all true; but, if devotion could make up for it, the service of my life——'

'Mr. Murray,' said Miss Jean at last, interrupting him, putting out her hand to stop him, 'wherefore would you do all this for me? What

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is it you are wanting? It must be just my fancy, though I am sure my fancy was never in that way—but you seem to be making me an offer, to me that might be your mother. It cannot be that, it is not possible; but that is what it seems.'

'It is so,' said poor Lewis, overwhelmed with such a sense of his own youngness, triflingness, insignificance, as he had never been conscious of before. 'It is so! I want nothing better in this world than that you should let me love you, and take care of you; and if you would overlook my deficiencies, and be my——'

'Oh, hush, hush!' cried Miss Jean, her face growing very pale. She sat for a moment with her hands clasped together, the lines of her countenance tremulous with emotion, 'you must not say that word—oh! no, you must not say that word. There was a time when it was said to me by one—that would be gone almost before you were born.'

If Lewis had been suddenly struck by a thunderbolt he could not have been more startled, his whole being seemed arrested; he was silent, put a stop to, words and thoughts alike. He could do nothing but gaze at her, astonished, incapable even of thought.

Now whether it was simple instinct, or whether it was a gleam of genius unknown in her before (and the two things are not much different), Miss Jean, as soon as she perceived what it meant, which it was so difficult to do, perceived the way out of it in a moment. Her first words closed the whole matter as effectually, as completely as if it had never been.

'You would never hear of that,' she said. 'How should you? I was but very young myself; at an age when that is natural. He was a sailor and a poor man. My father would never hear of it, and perhaps it could not have been; it is not for me to say. But the Lord had settled that in His great way, that puts us all to shame. It is my delight and pride,' said Miss Jean, her soft eyes filling with something that looked like light rather than tears, 'that it was permitted to him to end his days saving life, and not destroying it. There were seven of them that he saved. It is a long time ago. You know grief cannot last; it is just like a weed, it is not a seed of God; but love lasts long, long, just for ever. There are few people that mind, or ever take thought about him and me. But just now and then to a kind heart like you,

and one that understands, it comes into my head to tell that old story. You would scarcely be born,' Miss Jean added, with a smile that seemed to Lewis ineffable, full of the tenderest sweetness. He was entirely overcome. He had not been used to the restraints which Englishmen make for themselves. His eyes were full and running over. He leaned forward to her, listening, with a kind of worship in his face. He had forgotten all the incongruous folly of his suit as if it had never been, without being ashamed or wounded, or feeling any obstacle rise up because of it, between him and her. She had opened her tender heart to him in the very act of showing that it was closed and sacred for ever and ever. How long that moment lasted they neither of them knew. But presently he came to himself, feeling her soft, caressing hand upon his arm and hearing her say, 'You will go and play me something, my bonnie man, and that will put us all right.'

'My bonnie man!'—he had heard the women calling their children so. It seemed to him the most exquisite expression of motherhood, of tender meaning and unspeakable distance that he had ever heard in his life. He went away

like a child to the piano, and sat down there, hushed and yet happy, his heart quivering with sympathy, and affection, and ease, and peace; and Miss Jean folded her soft hands in her lap, and gave herself up to listening, with that look of entire absorption and content which he thought he had never seen in any other face. The music wafted her away out of everything troublous and painful, wafted her feelings to a higher presence, into some ante-chamber where chosen souls can hear some notes of the songs of the angels. He had played Beethoven to her and Mozart on the other occasions, now he chose Handel, filling the silent room with anthems and symphonies of heaven. He watched her lean back, her eyes growing dim with a silent rapture, till it became apparent that all the circumstances of common life had gone from her, and that her soul had lost itself in that world of exquisite sensation and perfect peace.

This was the end of Lewis's first attempt at wooing. Before he had done, Miss Margaret came in, who made him a sign to go on; and listened very respectfully, with great attention and stillness, making not a movement that could disturb her sister or the performance. When it

was over, she said it was beautiful, and that he must stay and take a cup of tea; and presently Lilias and Katie joined the party, two fair young creatures full of what is considered the poetry of life. Miss Jean had resumed her table-cover by this time, and sat among her silks, puzzling a little which to choose, very undecided and vacillating, between a yellow-brown and an orange-red for one of the shades of her carnation. Lilias and Katie both gave advice which was authoritative, wondering how there could be any question as to which was the best.

'It is your eyes that are going,' Lilias said, in thoughtless impatience.

'My dear, I suppose it must just be that,' said Miss Jean. She was exactly as she always was, returned into all the little details of her gentle life, and not one of them was aware into what lofty regions she had been wandering. She spoke without the slightest embarrassment to Lewis, and looked up with all her usual kindness, quite matter-of-fact and ordinary, into his face. 'You will not be long of coming back,' she said, with a smile.

He felt too much bewildered to make any reply; the change from that wonderful inter-

view in which he had been raised from earth to heaven, in which his heart had beat so high, and his life had hung in the balance, into the calm scene of the drawing-room with its tea-table, the lady who said that last thing was just beautiful, and the airy talk of the girls, was so bewildering that he could not realise it. He had been obliged to rouse himself up, to act like an ordinary denizen of the daylight, to laugh and listen even to Katie, as if that strange episode had never been; but when he went away he went back into it, and could not think even of Lilias. With what a strange gravity as of despair he had gone away from the side of Lilias to make this attempt which he thought honour and good faith made necessary, feeling all the while that in doing so he was giving up the brighter happiness, the more natural life that had been revealed to him. But, after that interview with Miss Jean, Lilias herself had seemed tame. He did not wish to stay in her presence, to behold her beauty; he wanted to get away to think over the strange scene that had passed. He made his way through the park, not thinking where he was going, as far as New Murkley, then through the woods to the old quarry and

the waterside, and during all this round he thought of nothing but Miss Jean and her story, and the way in which she had put him from her without a word of refusal, without a harsh tone, putting him away, yet bringing him closer to her very feet. He was refused, and that by a woman who, in comparison with himself, was an old woman, who permitted him to see that his suit was as folly to her, that she did not and would not give it a moment's consideration; and yet he was not affronted nor offended, nor did he feel the smallest shade of bitterness.

It all seemed astonishing to Lewis. Was it the difference of English ways and manners, or was it individual? But he could not make it clear to himself which it was. He walked round by the waterside and into the village that way, not to distract himself, but to have more time to think it over. His heart had been so deeply touched that he was still quivering with its effect. Everything seemed to have changed to him. He had believed last time he went by this way that his life was to be spent henceforward in a state of voluntary renunciation. He had meant to give up all that was warmest and sweetest in it, to content himself with a sub-

dued and self-restrained well-being. Now all that was over, the situation changed, and he might hope like any other man to have what all men coveted. And yet he was not exhilarated. His mind had not leapt back to the thought of Lilias, as would have been so natural. Lilias seemed to have faded into the background; he scarcely thought of her at all. Happiness seemed to have become a thing secondary, almost an inferior item in the history even of the heart.

The landscape was very still in the afternoon quiet. The children were all at school, except the funny little parti-coloured group which belonged to the ferryman, little creatures like chickens, with lint-white heads and round, red cheeks, who were always on the very edge of the river, in risk, as it seemed, of their lives, but to whom nothing ever happened, except an occasional shrill cry of the mother from the cottage, or deep bass objurgation of the ferryman himself. They should all have been drowned a dozen times over, but were not. The big boat was making its way across with a farmer's shandry-dân upon it, reflected in the clear brown of the rushing water. Just within

the shadow of the high cliff above which was crowned by the tower of the Stormonts, Lewis saw a fish leap half out of the water, with a gleam and splash. This sufficed to do what even Lilias had not done, to turn the current of his thoughts. He had not been able to get back to any consideration of his changed prospects and regained freedom, but the flash of the trout struck some accidental chord. With a half laugh at the curious importance of this new subject, he crossed the broad opening of the village street, and went along the bank to Adam's usual nook opposite the cliff. There Adam was posted, as usual, one foot advanced to give him a firmer standing ground, his arms thrown high, a fine athletic image, against the brown water and the green leaves. Lewis went and stood by him for a time without saying anything. He felt a certain ease and sense of deliverance in the quiet scene, where there was enough to occupy the eye and a certain superficial mind, which occasionally takes the place of the real one, and to make thought unnecessary. His deeper cogitations dropped like a falling wind, and he watched with an amused interest the movements, so

wary and skilful, the deep silence, and absorbed excitement of the fisher. It was only when the trout was landed and Adam took breath, that Lewis ventured to speak.

'That is a fine fellow,' he said.

'Nothing to speak of,' said Adam, throwing the silvery creature on the grass, with a certain contempt. 'Lord, to think of a' that time wared upon a brute that will scarce make a mouthful a-piece for twa-three hungry men!'

'The brute, as you call it, would willingly have let you off.'

'Oh, ay, sir, that's true enough. It's just as little sensible o' the end o' its being as you and me. The creatures o' God are a' alike, so far as that goes.'

'Do you think, then, that the end of its being is that mouthful a-piece? I would rather think of the river, where no doubt poor Mrs. Trout and the little ones are expecting your victim home.'

Adam shook his head with a short laugh.

'Ceevilization,' he said, 'stops on the land, Mr. Murray. Thae kind of regulations gi'e little trouble in the breast of Tay. That's just an ordinance of Providence, I would say;

for, if there was any natural feeling among the brute creation, every river, and every moor, and a' the wild places of the earth would be naething but just a moanin' and a mournin'.'

'That is not a pleasant thought for you slaughterers of your fellow-creatures. I have my conscience clear,' Lewis said, with a smile.

Adam looked at him with a mild contempt, but made no remark. Then he said,

'Did you ever hear the sheep on the hill-sides when their lambs are ta'en from them? Oh, but yon's heart-breakin'. They're nothing but the inferior creation, and if they've hearts or no, I canna tell; but it's certain they have nae souls. For a' that, when I hear thae puir beasts, nothing will come into my head but just the Scripture itsel', which nae doubt was made for higher uses. Rachel weepin' for her children, and would not be comforted. It makes a man silly to hear them—when he has ony thought.'

'There was once a saint in Italy,' said Lewis, 'that was not of your opinion about the animals. When he was tired of preaching to men, he preached to the birds or the fishes. The birds made a great noise one day in the middle of

his sermon to the men, and he stopped and rebuked them, bidding them be silent till their turn came.'

'And what came of that?' said Adam, quickly, looking up with a glance of interest. He was ashamed of it apparently, for he followed it up with a low laugh. 'He would be one of thae craturs in the Middle Ages,' he added, in a lower tone.

'The story says that the swallows, and the sparrows, and all the rest settled upon the roof and among the pinnacles of the cathedral, and everything was still till the sermon was over.'

'And syne they had their turn?' Adam said, with the same low laugh. He was a little moved by the story. 'It's a very bonnie fancy. Burns might have made a poem about it, if he had ever heard it. He was one that had a real pitiful heart for the dumb creatures too. Do ye mind that, when he's lying in his bed warm and safe, and hearing the wind brattle at the windows, and like to take off the roof, "I think upon the oorie cattle," he says. Man, that's come into my head mony's the night! but the kye and the yowes, they're a kind o' human beasts, and the birds are like bairns,

mair or less; but I canna get ony sentiment about the trout. There's nae feeling in them. They'll fight for their lives, but no for one another; and nae sort of sense in them that ever I heard.'

'There was another saint that preached to the fishes—but I don't know the result,' said Lewis. 'No doubt it was meant to show the people that these were their fellow-creatures too.'

'I like none of your explanations,' said Adam, with a half angry glance. 'If the man that preached to them didna believe in them, he was just a dreamer, and the swallows would never have bud still for him, ye may take my word. Na,' said Adam, 'I'll say nothing about miracles—but, when there's a real true feeling, that has an awfu' grand effeck. Just a man that looks in your face, and believes in ye. That's a kind of inspiration. Bird, or beast, or, waur than ony, a contradictious human creature—ye'll no escape the power o' that.'

Lewis said nothing. His eyes flooded silently with tears. They did not fall, not because he was ashamed of them, like an ordinary Briton, but because the emotion in his brain seemed

too still for that demonstration. His heart filled, like his eyes, with a sacred flood of tenderness. He had not escaped the power of that. It made him sad with exquisite sympathy, and happy with such a sense of the beauty of truth and faithfulness, and a constant heart, as in all his life he had had no comprehension of before.

## CHAPTER X.

MISS JEAN returned to her work after tea. It was her time for taking her walk, either with her sister, if Margaret had any inclination that way, or by herself, in the contemplative stillness of the Ghost's Walk. But this afternoon she sat still over that carnation which was never ending, with its many little leaves and gradations of colour; the carnation in the glass which she was copying had twice been removed, and perhaps it was the little apology with which she thought it necessary to account for her departure from her usual habit of taking a little relaxation at this time of the day, that aroused Miss Margaret's suspicion.

'I think I must just finish this flower. I have been a terrible time at it,' Miss Jean said.

'Ye may well say that,' said her sister; 'it will never be done. You will come back and

work at it to frighten Lilias' grandchildren after we are all in our graves.'

'I will never do that,' said Miss Jean, firmly, 'whatever I may do.'

'There is no telling,' said Miss Margaret. 'I have often thought, if there were any ghosts, that a poor thing in that condition might just wander back to its old dwelling and hover about its old ways, without a thought that it might be a terror to those that behold it. It would not be easy to conceive that kindly folk in your house would be frightened at you.'

'But, Margaret, how would a blessed existence that had passed into the heavens themselves come back to hover about earthly howffs and haunts? Oh, no, I cannot think that. To do a service or to give a warning, you could well understand; but just to wander about and frighten the innocent——'

'It is not a subject I have studied,' said Miss Margaret, 'though there's Lady Jean out there in the walk has had a weary time of it, summer and winter, if all tales be true. The music this afternoon must have been very moving, and you and your musician, you have grown great friends. I would have said you had both been greeting,

if there could be any possible reason for it.'

Jean's head was bent over her work, but Margaret kept her keen eyes fixed upon her. It was not a look which it was easy to ignore.

'It was Handel,' said Miss Jean, softly; 'there are some parts that would just wile your heart out of your breast, and some that are like the thunder rolling and the great winds. Friends, did you say? Oh, yes, we are great friends; and we were greeting together, though you may wonder, Margaret. He was telling me of his own affairs: and somehow, before ever I knew, I found that I was telling him about mine: and we both shed tears, I will not deny, he for my trouble, I am thinking, and me partly for his.'

'And what was his, if one might ask?' Miss Margaret said.

'Mostly the troubles of a young spirit that has not learned to measure the world like you and me, Margaret, and that has little sense of what is out of his reach and what is in. And me, I was such an old haverel that I could not keep myself to myself, but just comforted him with telling him. He is a fine lad, Margaret; I never saw one that was more ready to feel.'

'More ready, perhaps, than was wanted,' cried

Margaret, who could not divest herself of a little indignation and alarm.

'It's not easy to be too ready with your sympathy,' said her sister, mildly. 'Few folk are that.'

Margaret was silent, wondering much what had passed. She stood at the window pretending to look out. She was perhaps a little jealous of the love of her life's companion. Had she known nothing of Lewis' intentions, there was indeed no indication to warn her that Jean's calm had been thus disturbed. She had expected some flutter in her sister's gentle spirit. She had expected perhaps a little anger, a few tears, or, what would have been worse, an exaggerated pity for the young man, and a flattered sense of power on Jean's part. Not one of these sentiments was visible in her. An anxious eye could see some traces of emotion: and that she had been much moved was certain, or she would not have 'comforted him by telling him,' as she had said. Margaret, who was excited and uneasy, was almost jealous that, even by way of crushing this young man's presumptuous hopes, Jean should so far have admitted him into her confidence as to tell him her own story; even that was a great deal too much.

'I would like to know,' she said, 'what right a strange lad could have, that is not a drop's blood to us, to come with his stories to you?'

'Poor callant!' said Miss Jean, 'he has no mother. It was perhaps that, Margaret.'

'Was he looking for a mother in you?' cried Margaret, sharply. If she had detected a blush, a smile, a movement of womanly vanity still lingering, there is no telling what Miss Margaret would have been capable of. But Jean worked on at her carnation in her tremulous calm, and made no sign. Perhaps it was the last sublimated essence of that womanly vanity which made her so tender of the young intruder. She would not hand him over to ridicule any more than to indignation. It was perhaps the first secret she had ever kept from Margaret; but then it was his secret, and not hers.

'He did not just say that, or perhaps think it,' said Miss Jean; 'he may have thought I would be affronted, being a single person: but that was what he meant.'

'I hope you will never encourage such folly,' said Margaret. 'It is a thing that always ends in trouble. You are not old enough to be a man's mother, and it is very unbecoming; it is

even not—delicate. You, that have been all your life like the very snowdrift, Jean!'

Jean raised her mild eyes to her sister. They were more luminous than usual with the tears that had been in them. There was a look of gentle wonder in their depths. The accusation took her entirely by surprise, but she did not say anything in her own defence. If there was any reproach in the look, it was of the gentlest kind. It was perhaps the first time in her life that Jean felt herself Margaret's superior. But she did not take any pleasure in her triumph. As for Margaret, her suspicion or temper could not bear that look. She stamped her foot suddenly on the floor with a quick cry.

'I am just a fool!' she said, turning all her weapons against herself in a moment—'just a fool! There's not another word to say.'

'You were never that, Margaret.'

'I have just been *that* all my life, and I will be so to my dying day!' cried Margaret, vehemently; and then she laughed, but not at her own want of grammar, of which she was unconscious. 'And you are just a gowk, too,' she added, in her more usual tone.

'That may very well be, Margaret,' said Miss

Jean, returning to her carnation; and not a word more was said between the sisters of this curious incident.

But it was a long time before Margaret dismissed it from her mind. She watched Jean and all her movements, with many attempts to discover what effect had been produced upon her. But Jean went about her gentle occupations just as usual. The one departure from her customary routine was the omission of that evening walk. No doubt such a thing had happened before without attracting any notice; and if she were more still and silent than usual during the evening, where could there be a more natural explanation of that than in the fact which she had confessed that she had told her own story to her visitor? Not for nothing are those doors of the past opened. However entirely the sorrow that is long over may dwell in the mind, there is an agitation, a renewal of the first acuteness of the pain in the re-telling of it. Miss Margaret said all this to herself, and fully accounted for any little change which her keen inspection found out in the demeanour of her sister; but, indeed, had it not been for that close watch, there was no change. She had not been dis-

turbed in the calm of her spirit—perhaps she had not quite realised what Lewis meant. Afterwards it was certain, when she thought it over, she rejected altogether the hypothesis which had been forced upon her by his words, and said to herself that she must have taken him up altogether wrong. What motive could he have in speaking so to her? She was old, she was without money or any recommendation, and it was not as if he had known her long, to grow fond of her, as will happen sometimes without thought or premeditation on either side. She thought to herself that it was very fortunate she had not been betrayed into any expression that could have shown her mistake, for it must have been a mistake. And how fortunate that it had blown over so easily, for they were better friends than ever, and the sweet-hearted lad had wept actual tears for her trouble. The Lord bless him for it! Miss Jean said, with gratitude and tender pleasure. And then she fell to thinking how wonderful it was that you will sometimes unbar your secret heart to a stranger when you could not do it to those you see every day. How strange that was, with a confusing sort of sense in it, that in the dimness of this

world, where you can only see the outside, those that were made to be the dearest of friends might never find each other out. But that was too deep a thought for Miss Jean, who returned to her carnation, and worked away a bit of musing into it in little broken half suggestions, which never made themselves into words, but which made her life far more full and sweet, as she sat there and patiently worked the silken flowers into a piece of stuff not half worth the trouble—than anyone knew or suspected. Margaret would be a little impatient of its long duration sometimes, and even of the stooping of Jean's head, as she sat against the light in the window, with her basket of silks and the carnation in the glass.

This episode, however, was lost in the stir of the preparations for Lilias' first appearance in the world. Needless to say that no idea of the possibility of any incident in which she herself was not the central figure ever crossed the mind of Lilias. Her sisters were her guardians, the chief upholders of the little world of which she herself was the interest and living centre. That anything apart from herself should happen to them was as impossible as

that everything should not happen to her, standing as she did upon the threshold of life. A natural conviction so undoubting would have closed her eyes even if there had been anything to see; and there was nothing, save in Miss Margaret's anxious fancy. She was the one of the party who was disturbed by the visit of Lewis. When he came back, as he did very soon, it is impossible to describe the restless anxiety of Margaret. She would have liked to see from some coign of vantage what they were doing; she would have liked to overhear their talk. Her impatience was almost irrestrainable while she sat and listened to Lilias reading. What was Queen Elizabeth to her? It was right, no doubt, that the child should be brought up in right views. But what if in the meantime all that mysterious scene which had passed downstairs out of her knowledge should be gone over again, and Jean, always too gentle, be this time over-persuaded? So restless did she become that Lilias at last paused in her reading.

'You are tired, Margaret; you are anxious about something. What is it?' the girl said.

'Me—anxious—what should I be anxious about? I am thinking of your dress, if it

was right to have it silk—muslin would have been better at your age; and then there is Jean no doubt just taigled with that young lad, and not able to get him off her hands.'

'Oh, as for Jean, do you not hear the piano, Margaret? You may be sure she is perfectly happy: for, you know, Mr. Murray is a great performer. Mrs. Seton says so, and she knows about music.'

'I am sick of Mrs. Seton and her great performers. Murray! who knows even if he is a Murray? He cannot tell who he belongs to. If he was come of any Murray that has ever been heard tell of, he would know that——'

'I daresay,' said Lilias, boldly, 'there are a great many Murrays, very nice people, that have never been heard tell of——'

'Lilias!' said her sister, in dismay. 'It is a great deal you can know about it,' she added, with a somewhat angry laugh. Her mind was more easy when she heard the piano. Nothing of importance could be talked about while it went on in full force.

'I don't know very much, Margaret; but everybody is allowed to think,' said the girl; 'and old families, like old clothes, most surely

wear out. I am not sure that it is such an advantage to be old. If I were a new man, I think I would be proud of it. It would be all my own doing; or, if I were a new man's daughter, it would be grand to think that it was all from my father, him and nobody else. That would be something to be proud about.'

'Money,' Margaret said, laconically, and with an accent of disdain.

'Money! Oh, but I did not mean money.'

'Do you know what you meant?' said Miss Margaret, scornfully. 'What does a new man, as you call it, make but money? For honours, you must have time and opportunity. In these days it is a quack medicine, or a new invention for taking work out of poor men's hands, or the grand art of selling water for milk, and carrion for meat, and the sweepings of the house for honest cloth. It's that that makes a new man; and it would be a great credit and honour, no doubt, to be his daughter.'

'Margaret, you know that is not what I meant,' cried Lilias, indignant. 'I was not thinking of the people that are only rich. I was thinking——'

'I well understand that you know nothing

about it; and how should you? But one thing of this age is that the babes and sucklings just think themselves as wise as Solomon in all his glory. I cannot hear if that piano is aye bumming. Bless me, what a waste for a young man that might be on the hill-side—or he might be in the colonies making corn grow for the good of man—or taming down the savages in Africa.'

'He could not be on the hill-side, if you mean shooting, Margaret, for you forget it's only July——'

'He might be doing many better things than sitting at a piano at his age, deluding an old maid.'

'Margaret!' cried Lilias, springing up with flashing eyes. 'Is it my Jean you are calling *that?*'

'Well! and what else is she? or me, either, for that matter. Just two old maids: and, for anything we know, you may be a third yourself, more likely than not, unless you take the first that offers—which was what neither her nor me were allowed to do.'

'I will never take the first that offers,' cried Lilias, indignantly. 'What is the matter with you, Margaret? Music is always called such a

fine thing in books. If we do not care for it, perhaps it is our fault; and Jean is so fond of it, which shows it must be good.'

There had been a lull in the sound of the piano which had called forth Margaret's outburst. She was more charitable as it went on.

'If you are going to read your book, Lilias,' she said, 'go on with it: but, if you are going to argue, just put the other away first. For my part, I think it is about time for the tea.'

And when she went downstairs everything was re-assuring. The music was tranquil, and Miss Jean quite calm, not even excited and ecstatic, as she had been on previous occasions. The perfect composure of the atmosphere smoothed Miss Margaret down in a moment, and, as so often happens after a false alarm, she was more gracious, more gay than usual in the relief of her mind.

'Jean,' she said, 'you must mind that Mr. Murray is a young man, and wants diversion —not to be kept close to a piano on a bonnie summer afternoon, when everybody that can be out, is out, and enjoying this grand weather. I would not say but what music was a great diversion too—but we are old, and he is young.'

'I have had my fill of sunshine,' said Lewis, 'and sketched everything there is to sketch within a mile or two. And I have no piano. I hope you are not going now to turn me away.'

'So you sketch too? Yes, I heard it before no doubt, but I had forgotten. You are a very accomplished young man. In our day, it was the young ladies that learned all that; the boys were packed away into the Army, or the Navy, or to India, and never had any time. It was the girls of a family——'

'But oh, Margaret! if you will think what kind of music and drawing it was! "Rousseau's Dream" upon the piano, and a painted flower upon cardboard. I think shame when you speak of it. A real musician—and a true artist is very different——'

'I don't merit those fine titles,' said Lewis, with a laugh. 'I understand what Miss Margaret means. The thing to do for me is to turn me loose upon New Murkley, and let me decorate those great rooms. I have a little turn that way. I have seen the great palaces of that architecture, and I have studied. I should be no more idle, if you would permit me to do that.'

'Decorate the rooms! But that would be worse still than being idle,' said Margaret. 'For it would be work for no use. If no miracle happens to the family, so far as I can see, Lilias will just have to pull down that fool's palace, or sell it, one or the other. You need not cry out. What would you do with it, you silly thing, with no money to keep it up?'

'I will never sell it,' cried Lilias, with flashing eyes.

'That would be the best; for we might get some new rich person, one of the men you admire, Lilias, to give a sum of money for it. And you might build a wall between it and us, and we would be none the worse. Pulling it down would be a waste, though it would be more comformable to one's feelings; for you would get nothing but the price of old materials for that big castle that we have looked at all our lives. But, any way, to decorate a house that is doomed, and not a window in it to keep out the weather——'

'It might be made into a hospital,' said Miss Jean. 'That has always been my notion, Margaret. We can make no use of it ourselves,

and it would be a heartbreak to sell it, and Lilias would never like to pull down such solid bonnie walls. I doubt even if it would be right.'

'Why should it not be right, you veesionary? It is her own at least, to do as she pleases—if once she were of full age, and nothing can be done before that.'

'But, Margaret, there's more in it—solid bonnie walls that took a long time to build, and a good warm steady roof, and all the grand, big rooms, though there's nothing in them—and when you consider the poor sick folk and the helpless bairns that have no shelter! I'm not clear in my mind that it would be a lawful thing,' Miss Jean said.

'Did I not say she was a veesionary?' said Margaret. 'We would have had no shelter to our own heads, let alone help for the poor folk, if I had not been here to look over the house. We are just an impracticable race. One has one whimsey, and one another. The thing has been built for a fancy, and our fancies will keep us from getting rid of it. I am not sure that I am heartwhole myself. I would not like to see a pickaxe laid upon it.

We will have to make up our minds before Lilias comes of age. But, one way or another, Mr. Murray, you will see that decorations are not just our affair. We are meaning to be— in town for the next season,' she added, with the solemnity which such a statement demanded. 'And afterwards our movements may be a little uncertain, not knowing what that may lead to. It is just possible that we may come no more to Murkley till Lilias is of age.'

Lewis made no reply. He had to receive the intelligence with a bow; it was not his part to criticise, or even to regret. He had come fortuitously across their path, and had not even standing ground enough with them to venture to say that he hoped the friendship might not end there. To Miss Jean, had he been alone with her, he could have said this, but not under Margaret's keen, all-inspecting eye. It was with a mixture of pain and pleasure that he felt himself in the background, listening to what they said. The very termination of his plans in respect to Miss Jean detached him, and made him feel himself a stranger in the midst of this little company of women, to which he had attached himself so completely in his own

thoughts. So long as that question was unresolved, Lewis had felt, even with a sort of despairing acquiescence, that he was one of them, though they did not know it, with a certain concern in all their family arrangements, and hold upon them. Now this visionary right had gone altogether, and he knew that he was of no importance, nothing to them one way or another. It chilled him to feel it, and yet there was no doubt that it was so, and that he could expect or look for nothing else. He sat by for a while in silence, with a sort of smile, while they proceeded to talk of other things. Now and then Miss Jean would make an effort of kindness to bring him into the current, but he felt that he had nothing to do with that current. He was outside; he felt even that he ought to go away, and that it was rude not to do so; but at the same time it was difficult for him to issue forth from the charmed circle. Once gone, it seemed to Lewis that he could scarcely have a pretence for coming again.

At last he got up to go away.

'You will come again soon?' said Miss Jean.

'Bless me, Jean,' said Margaret, 'you must think Mr. Murray has little to do that he will

come day after day at your bidding; though we are always glad to see him, I need not say,' she added, with some ghost of cordiality.

He felt himself standing before her as if she had been his judge, and looked at her somewhat wistfully; but there was no encouragement in Margaret's face. Lewis felt that the hand she gave him made a gesture of dismissal. He walked to the door sadly enough. It seemed to him that, his first attempt having ended in failure, there was no further opportunity left him by which to approach the family which he had so unwittingly wronged. He felt abashed and humbled by his failure. To have been accepted by Miss Jean, although that would have been to separate him from all brighter hopes, would have been far better than this. Then at least he would have had some means of reparation. Now it seemed, as he turned his back upon them, as if he were turning his back also upon the honest wish which had brought him here, the generous desire that had been his leading principle ever since he had heard of old Sir Patrick's rightful heirs. Lewis was exceedingly cast down and troubled. He thought, as he went slowly across the old hall, that in all pro-

bability he would never be admitted to it again.

There was no servant to open the door to him, none of the usual urgency of politeness by which one of the ladies themselves, if Simon were out of the way, would accompany a visitor to the threshold. It was one sign of their dismissal of him, he thought, that he was to let himself out without a word from anyone. As he put his hand, however, reluctantly upon the door, Lewis was suddenly aware of a skim and flutter across the oak floor and the old Turkey carpet in the centre of the hall, and, looking up, perceived with a start and flush Lilias herself, and no other, who had darted after him from the open door of the drawing-room. It lasted only a moment, but he saw it like a picture. The girl in her light dress, dazzling, with her fair head and smiling countenance bent towards him: and beyond her, in the room within that open door, Margaret standing in an attitude of watchfulness, keenly listening, intent upon what passed. Lilias had flown after him, indifferent to all remonstrance. Her sweet voice, with its little trick of accent, and the faint cadence in it of the lingering vowels, had a touch of gay defiance in its sound.

'You are not going away,' she said—'you are to be at the ball—you are not to forget. And perhaps we shall dance together,' she said, with a smile, offering him her hand.

What was he to do with her hand when he got it? Not shake it and let it drop, like an ordinary Englishman. He had not been bred in that way. He bowed over it and kissed it before Lilias knew. He would have kissed her slipper had he dared, but that would have been an unusual homage, whereas this was the most natural, the most simple salutation in the world.

It took Lilias altogether by surprise. No lip of man had ever touched her hand before. Her fair face turned crimson. She could not have been more astonished had he kissed her cheek, though the astonishment would have been of a different kind. She stood bewildered when this wonderful thing had happened, looking at her hand almost with alarm, as if the mark would show. She was ready to say, 'It was not my fault,' in instinctive self-defence. And yet she was not offended or displeased, but only startled. What would Margaret say? what would Jean say? or should she tell them? To end this self-

discussion, she fled upstairs suddenly to her own room, and there considered the question, and the incident which was the strangest that ever had happened to her in all her life.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE night of the Stormont ball was as lovely and warm as a July night could be so far north. It was, it is scarcely necessary to say, full moon, country entertainers taking care to secure that great luminary to light their guests home, though in this case it was scarcely necessary, for no one intended that anything less than daylight should see them leave the scene of the festivities. The commotion was great in the old house, where every servant felt like one of the hosts, and the house was turned upside down from top to bottom with an enjoyment of the topsy-turvy which only a simple household unused to such incidents can know. Mrs. Stormont had spared no expense; there were lanterns hung among the trees, along the whole length of the avenue; there were lights in every window; even on the top of the old tower there was

a blaze which threw a red reflection on the water, and was the admiration of the village. To see the ladies of Murkley cross in the great ferry-boat in their old-fashioned brougham, which was scarcely big enough to hold the three, and the Setons after them, wrapped up in cloaks and 'clouds,' was a sight that filled all Murkley with pleasure. 'And they'll come back like that at three or four in the morning. Eh, bless me! but they maun be keen of pleasure to gang through a' that for't,' the elderly sceptics said; but they were pleased to see the ladies in their fine dresses all the same. Miss Jean had a silver-grey satin, a soft, poetical dress that suited her; but Miss Margaret, notwithstanding the season, was in velvet, with point-lace that a queen might have envied. As for Lilias, it was universally acknowledged that the ball-dress which had come for her from London 'just beat a'.' Nothing like it had ever been imagined in Murkley. We have read in an American novel—where such glories abound—an account of a lovely *confection* by Mr. Worth, called the 'Blush of Dawn,' or some other such ethereal title, by which an awed spectator might see what a fine thing a ball-dress could be; but

English narrative is not equal to the occasion, and the dress of Lilias was white and virginal, as became the wearer, and afforded no such opportunities to the historian. These two parties were the only ones that crossed the ferry. Peter the ferryman was aware that their coming back might abridge his rest, and was not over-gracious.

'It'll be fower in the mornin' or sae, or ye come back?' he said to old Simon on the box of the brougham.

'Me! I'm coming back to my supper and my bed,' said the other; 'but fower is late for the leddies. I would say atween twa and three,' which made Peter grave.

'One man's meat is another's man's poison,' he said to himself. The manse party would certainly not return till four at the earliest, so that he had the comfortable prospect of being up al night, 'and none o' the fun,' not even a dram to keep him warm: for even a July morning, between two and four, is a chilly moment so far north. The high-road was in a cloud of dust with the carriages that came rolling along from all quarters in the soft twilight; for, though in July the days have shortened a little, the skies

'I have had my fill of sunshine,' said Lewis, 'and sketched everything there is to sketch within a mile or two. And I have no piano. I hope you are not going now to turn me away.'

'So you sketch too? Yes, I heard it before no doubt, but I had forgotten. You are a very accomplished young man. In our day, it was the young ladies that learned all that; the boys were packed away into the Army, or the Navy, or to India, and never had any time. It was the girls of a family——'

'But oh, Margaret! if you will think what kind of music and drawing it was! "Rousseau's Dream" upon the piano, and a painted flower upon cardboard. I think shame when you speak of it. A real musician—and a true artist is very different——'

'I don't merit those fine titles,' said Lewis, with a laugh. 'I understand what Miss Margaret means. The thing to do for me is to turn me loose upon New Murkley, and let me decorate those great rooms. I have a little turn that way. I have seen the great palaces of that architecture, and I have studied. I should be no more idle, if you would permit me to do that.'

'Decorate the rooms! But that would be worse still than being idle,' said Margaret. 'For it would be work for no use. If no miracle happens to the family, so far as I can see, Lilias will just have to pull down that fool's palace, or sell it, one or the other. You need not cry out. What would you do with it, you silly thing, with no money to keep it up?'

'I will never sell it,' cried Lilias, with flashing eyes.

'That would be the best; for we might get some new rich person, one of the men you admire, Lilias, to give a sum of money for it. And you might build a wall between it and us, and we would be none the worse. Pulling it down would be a waste, though it would be more comfortable to one's feelings; for you would get nothing but the price of old materials for that big castle that we have looked at all our lives. But, any way, to decorate a house that is doomed, and not a window in it to keep out the weather——'

'It might be made into a hospital,' said Miss Jean. 'That has always been my notion, Margaret. We can make no use of it ourselves,

and it would be a heartbreak to sell it, and Lilias would never like to pull down such solid bonnie walls. I doubt even if it would be right.'

'Why should it not be right, you veesionary? It is her own at least, to do as she pleases—if once she were of full age, and nothing can be done before that.'

'But, Margaret, there's more in it—solid bonnie walls that took a long time to build, and a good warm steady roof, and all the grand, big rooms, though there's nothing in them—and when you consider the poor sick folk and the helpless bairns that have no shelter! I'm not clear in my mind that it would be a lawful thing,' Miss Jean said.

'Did I not say she was a veesionary?' said Margaret. 'We would have had no shelter to our own heads, let alone help for the poor folk, if I had not been here to look over the house. We are just an impracticable race. One has one whimsey, and one another. The thing has been built for a fancy, and our fancies will keep us from getting rid of it. I am not sure that I am heartwhole myself. I would not like to see a pickaxe laid upon it.

We will have to make up our minds before Lilias comes of age. But, one way or another, Mr. Murray, you will see that decorations are not just our affair. We are meaning to be—in town for the next season,' she added, with the solemnity which such a statement demanded. 'And afterwards our movements may be a little uncertain, not knowing what that may lead to. It is just possible that we may come no more to Murkley till Lilias is of age.'

Lewis made no reply. He had to receive the intelligence with a bow; it was not his part to criticise, or even to regret. He had come fortuitously across their path, and had not even standing ground enough with them to venture to say that he hoped the friendship might not end there. To Miss Jean, had he been alone with her, he could have said this, but not under Margaret's keen, all-inspecting eye. It was with a mixture of pain and pleasure that he felt himself in the background, listening to what they said. The very termination of his plans in respect to Miss Jean detached him, and made him feel himself a stranger in the midst of this little company of women, to which he had attached himself so completely in his own

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'I was coming to see if I could get her partners,' said Mrs. Stormont. 'For not being out, or in society, as I understood——'

'I am sure you are very kind: but nobody need give themselves any trouble about Katie,' said Mrs. Seton.

It was 'not very nice' of Philip's mother to be displeased and angry when she heard this; for, as she took the trouble to separate Philip from her, she ought to have been glad that the girl, even if she was a 'little cutty,' should have others to amuse her: but Mrs. Stormont was not pleased. She felt injured by the popularity of the foolish little thing who had come between her son and herself.

Lilias enjoyed her first ball in a much more modest and subdued way. She stood by the side of her sisters, whose anxiety about the perfect success of her *début* was great, surveying the scene around her with a smile. She made the old-fashioned curtsey which they had taught her to the young men, who came round with eagerness, not only to do their duty to the old family tree, but to secure the hand of the heroine of the evening, the girl who had piqued the curiosity of the county more than anyone had done

before for generations, and who was at the same time the prettiest creature, the beauty of the assemblage. Lilias made her pretty curtsey to them, and gave each a smile, but she said,

'I do not mean to dance very much. I am not used to it. You must not think me uncivil. Thank you very kindly. No, I wish to look on, and see the others. It is so pretty. If I were to dance, I should not see it.'

Some of the suppliants were entirely discomfited by this novel reception; they retired in offence or in dismay; but those who were more discerning exercised a little diplomacy, and from time to time 'the lily of Murkley,' as Mrs. Stormont, for the greater glory of her entertainment, had called the girl, was led forth by a gratified partner, to the envy of the others. Her success in the obstinacy of her determination not to accept everybody, gave a little excitement of triumph to Lilias. She was pleased with herself and with everybody. As for the sisters, there can be no doubt that this singular behaviour brought on them a momentary cloud.

'I see Katie Seton dancing every dance,' Miss Jean said, with an air of trouble.

She looked wistfully at the partners whom Lilias sent away. And even Miss Margaret for the first moment was disappointed. The idea that anyone could imagine her child, her little princess, to be neglected, fired her soul, and it was all she could do to restrain herself when Mrs. Seton came bustling up to interfere.

'Dear me! dear me!' cried that energetic woman, 'do I see Lilias without a partner? I could not believe my eyes. No, no, you'll not tell me that the young men are so doited; there must just be some mistake. No doubt there is some mistake. They are frightened for you two ladies just like two duennas. A girl should be left to herself for a little. But just let me——'

'You'll observe, if you will wait for a moment,' said Miss Margaret, with dignity, 'that Lilias does not just dance with everybody. It is not my pleasure that she should. I am not one that would have a girl make herself cheap.'

'But not because she looks down upon any person,' cried Miss Jean, eagerly, 'because she is not just very strong, and we insist she should not weary herself, as it is her first ball, and she is not used to it.'

Thus they took upon themselves the blame:

while Lilias stood smiling by, and from time to time accepted the arm of a partner more fortunate than the rest, leaving her sisters in a flutter which it was difficult to conceal.

'Now what could be the reason of her choosing *him?*' Miss Jean whispered, in a faltering voice.

'Oh, just her ain deevil,' cried Miss Margaret, moved out of all decorum. 'I think the creature will just drive me out of my senses.'

'But she has good taste,' said Miss Jean, wistfully, 'on the whole.'

This action upon the part of Lilias changed to them the whole character of the evening. They would have liked that she should have been like Katie, besieged by partners. The partners, indeed, had besieged her, but the company was not aware of it, and it was possible that other people besides Mrs. Seton might suppose it to be neglect.

This was not the only way in which Lilias signalized herself, though fortunately it was only a few who were conscious of what she did. She was dancing with Philip Stormont, whom, with a sense of the obligations of a guest, she did not refuse, at the lower end of the gallery,

far away from the inspection of the greater ladies of the party. Poor Philip looked very glum indeed, especially when Katie, at a height of gaiety and excitement, which betrayed some sentiment less happy below, came across him. He had never danced with Katie the whole evening through, and as her enjoyment grew, his countenance became heavier and heavier. Poor Philip was too far gone to attempt any semblance of happiness; he turned round and round mechanically, feeling, perhaps, a little freedom with Lilias, an emancipation from all necessity to talk and look pleasant.

'Look at Philip Stormont revolving,' Katie said to Lewis, with whom she was dancing; 'he is like a figure on a barrel organ. I suppose he is tired, poor fellow. Perhaps he has been fishing all day, Mr. Murray. You admire him for fishing all day: and you have been doing nothing but playing the piano. I am sorry for Lilias; he is dragging her about as if she were a pedlar's pack. Let us go round and round them,' cried that spiteful little person, pressing her partner into a wilder pace.

'You must not be cruel,' said Lewis; 'you will be sorry to-morrow if you are cruel.'

'Cruel!' cried Katie—'he never asked me till it was far too late. Was I going to wait for him—he that has always come to us as long as I can recollect?—and he never asked me. I want to show him the difference,' Katie cried.

Next moment she begged her partner to stop, that she was out of breath. The poor little girl was too young to be able to keep the mastery over herself all the evening. The tears were very near her eyes as she laughed in Philip's face, who had come ponderously to a stop also close to her.

'I hope you are enjoying your ball,' she said, maliciously. 'It is a beautiful ball, and you have danced with all the best people—you would, of course, in your own house,' Katie cried.

Philip was beyond speech; he heaved a sigh, which nearly blew out the nearest lights, and cast a pathetic look at her.

'Oh, yes, I have seen you; you have been enjoying yourself,' Katie cried, and laughed. 'I am quite ready, Mr. Murray.'

Upon this Lilias darted in, clapping her hands softly together as they do in childish games.

'We will change partners,' she cried. It seemed to Lewis that he had bounded suddenly

into the skies when she laid her hand on his shoulder. 'Quick, quick, that they may not stop us,' Lilias said.

And Lewis was not reluctant. They flew off together, leaving the other two astonished, confused, looking at each other.

'I suppose we may as well dance,' said Philip, and then he poured forth his heart. His little tormentor was taken by surprise. 'Oh, what a wretched night!' said poor Philip. 'I have been wondering whether it would ever be over, and, now that I have got you, it is against your will. I will never forget Lilias Murray for it all the same. That's what a good girl will do for you —a real true, good girl, by Jove, that does not mind what anybody thinks.'

'And I am a bad girl, I suppose?' said Katie, held fast in his arm, and carried along against her will, yet with a thrill of pleasure which had been absent from all her previous merry-making.

'Oh! I don't know what you are,' cried the angry lover. 'You are just you; there is nobody else. Oh! Katie, how are we to get out of this? I cannot go through such another night. If I had not got you, what would have happened to me?'

'Nothing,' cried Katie, almost sobbing, determined to laugh still at all costs; 'you would just have gone to your bed and had a good night's rest.'

'I think I would have gone to the bed of Tay,' cried poor Philip.

She laughed upon his shoulder till he could have beaten Katie, until he suddenly found the sound turn to crying, when Philip grew frightened and abject. He took her downstairs, as soon as she had recovered a little, to have some tea, and caught up the first shawl he could find and wrapped it round her, and led her out into the flower-garden, where the night odours were sweet from the invisible flowers, and the tower threw a deep black shadow, topped by the glare of the light which rose red and smoky against the shining of the moon. There were various other pairs about, but they kept in the moonlight. Philip and Katie felt themselves safer in the dark, and there lingered, it is needless to say, much longer than they ought.

'Are you shocked at my behaviour, Mr. Murray?' said Lilias. 'Should I not have done it? Perhaps I should not; but they were so unhappy. And I thought you would never mind. I do not

think I would have done it if it had not been you.'

'That is the best of all,' said Lewis.

'What is the best of all? It was taking a liberty—I am very conscious of that; but Jean says you are full of understanding. And you saw, didn't you, as well as me? Why should people come between other people, Mr. Murray? If I were Philip's mother—you need not laugh—'

'What should you do if you were Philip's mother?' he said.

'I would never, never stand between them. How can she tell she might not be spoiling his life? You read that in books often. Philip is not the grand kind of man who would die for love——'

'Do you think that would be a grand kind of man?'

'Oh, don't you? I would like to live among that kind of people. It would be far finer, far simpler, than the common kind that die just of illnesses and accidents like beasts. I would like to die by my heart.'

'I don't think Mr. Stormont will die.'

'No, he is not good enough,' said Lilias; 'he is afraid of his mother. I am a little afraid of Margaret, too; but I would not do an ill thing, I

think, even if she wanted me. To be sure, she never would want me. Do you know, I have had my way to-night; I have just refused the people I did not like. Katie dared me to do it, and Jean said I must not do it; but I did it—I was determined I would: and Margaret knew nothing about it, so she could not forbid me,' said Lilias, with a laugh.

'That was very prudent, when there is only one you are afraid of, not to let her know.'

'I did not keep it from her on purpose,' said Lilias, half offended. 'Mr. Murray, do you see that they have gone away downstairs? I am afraid they may be silly now they are together. Don't you think we should go too?'

'I will do whatever Miss Lilias pleases,' said Lewis, 'and go where you like best. After this you will give me one other little dance—just one; that was like heaven.'

'Heaven!' cried Lilias, scandalised. It seemed profanity to her innocent ears. 'That will be the way,' she said, somewhat severely, 'that people permit themselves to speak abroad? I have always heard—— But I am sure you did not mean it. It was very nice. I suppose, Mr. Murray, you dance very well?'

'I am not the judge,' said Lewis, laughing, but confused in spite of himself.

'Neither am I,' said Lilias, calmly, 'for I have never danced much with gentlemen. But you do not bump like most; you go so smoothly, it was a pleasure. But I wonder where Katie is? Doesn't it seem to you a long time?'

'It is only a moment since we have been together,' Lewis said.

'Do you think so? Oh! I am afraid a great many moments—even minutes. Look! Mrs. Stormont is beginning to be uneasy—she is looking for Philip. Oh! come before she sees——'

They hurried downstairs, Lilias leading the young man after her, with a guiding hand upon his arm. The great hall door was standing open, the freshness of the summer night coming in, close to the house a dark belt of shadow, and beyond the shrubberies and garden paths clear in the moonlight. It could only have been by instinct that Lilias penetrated round the corner to the lonely spot in the darkness where the two lovers had betaken themselves, and where Katie, after her hysterical outburst, had become calm again, and recovered command of herself. The darkness, and the moonlight,

and the soft noises and breathings of the night, and the neighbourhood of the other pair mounted into the head of Lewis. He scarcely knew what he was doing. He said in a whisper, 'Do not interrupt them. Wait here a little,' not knowing what he said.

Lilias did not object, or say a word. She took the *rôle* of sentinel quite calmly, while he stood by her, throbbing with a thousand motives and temptations. His own conscious being seemed arrested, his reason and intelligence; bold words came into his mind which he wanted to whisper to her—he bent towards her, in spite of himself approaching her ear. How was it that he said nothing? He could not tell. His heart beat so fast that it took away his breath. Had he not been so entirely transported out of himself he must have spoken, he must have betrayed himself. He felt afterwards, with a shudder, as if he had been on the edge of a bottomless pit, and had been kept on firm standing-ground not by any wisdom of his, but by the rapture of feeling which possessed him. He had kissed her hand in her own house without any hesitation or sense of timidity, but he did not do it now. He did not even touch with

his own the hand that lay on his arm. He was in a sort of agony, yet ecstasy. 'Wait a little, wait a little,' was all he said. And Lilias took no fright from the words. She did not know how near she was to some confession, some appeal that would have startled her at once out of her youthful freshness and serenity. They stood close together, like two different worlds, the one all passion and longing, the other all innocent composure and calm. But by degrees Lilias became impatient of waiting.

'You are kinder than I am,' she whispered, 'Mr. Murray. It is a little cold, and Mrs. Stormont will be looking everywhere for Philip. We must not stand any longer, we must try to find them. Do you see nothing?'

'Nothing,' said Lewis, with a gasp of self-restraint. His face seemed nearer to her than she expected, and perhaps this startled Lilias. She gave a sudden low cry through the stillness.

'Katie! are you there? Katie! are you there?'

## CHAPTER XII.

MRS. STORMONT felt that all was going well. Philip had not shown any great degree of gaiety, but he had done his duty like a man. The countess, after that duty-quadrille, had come and sat down beside her, and praised her son in words ever pleasant to a mother's ear.

'He did not pretend to like it,' she said; 'but he did his duty nobly. Now I hope he will enjoy himself: I have no objection to stand up with such a nice young fellow, but I think, dear Mrs. Stormont, that in the country we might dispense with these formal quadrilles that all the young people hate.'

'Perhaps I am an old-fashioned person,' said Mrs. Stormont; 'but it could be nothing but a pleasure to Philip.'

The countess shook her head, and said he was a fine young fellow that a mother might well be proud of.

'He is dancing with Ida now, which is more to the purpose,' she said.

Now Ida was her ladyship's niece, and for a moment it occurred to Philip's mother that perhaps she had come to a conclusion too quickly in respect to Lilias, and that her son, with all his attractions, might have done better. She had the good sense, however, to perceive that Lady Ida was altogether too great a personage for the Tower of Stormont: but this did not lessen her satisfaction in the good impression produced by her boy. And her confidence increased as the evening went on. She saw him taking out Lilias, dazzling in her fair beauty and white robes, and thought with natural pride that they made a lovely couple: he so dark-haired, brown, and manly, and she so fair. In all her progresses among her guests, her intimate conversations with one and another, Mrs. Stormont had always one eye directed towards Philip. He was very dutiful, and did all that she had pointed out to him as right and proper to do. And he kept away from the Setons. Her heart rose. Here it was evident she had succeeded in doing the right thing at the right time. She had separated

him from the manse people, and that little cutty, and she had put him in the way of better things. Naturally he would contrast little Katie with Lady Ida, or even with Lilias, and he would see how he had been taken in. All this went on to perfection till after supper, when, dancing having begun again with double energy, the evils above recounted took place quite out of sight of the anxious mother. Her vigilance had slackened. She had scorned to fix upon her son that all-seeing regard. She had even begun a little to enjoy herself among her old friends independent of him, with old recollections and many a scrap of individual biography. She had seated herself between Miss Margaret and Miss Jean, and, well pleased, was receiving their congratulations upon the success of everything, when it suddenly occurred to her that amid all the mazes of the dancers Philip was not anywhere visible. She watched with increased anxiety for a time: but after all he might have taken down some lady for refreshments, or to get a breath of fresh air after the dance.

'They will catch their death of cold,' she said, 'those thoughtless things! I have little

doubt my Philip is away into the moonlight with some of them, for I cannot see him.'

'Bless me! it will be our Lilias,' said Miss Margaret.

'Oh, I'll run and see that she has her cloak,' cried Miss Jean, starting to her feet, but both the elder sister and the mother protested against this extreme care.

'They must just take their chance,' said Miss Margaret. 'We cannot be always after her.'

'And my Philip will take care of that,' said Mrs. Stormont.

But after this alarm, the eyes of all were busy, watching for the truants. A vague uneasiness was in Mrs. Stormont's mind. If it was Lilias, as the other ladies said, then all was well: but the mother of a man recognises a perversity in that article which is never to be calculated upon. It was possible they might be mistaken. It was possible—who can tell what a young lad is not capable of? It was very consoling, very re-assuring that Lilias was invisible as well as Philip, but a hundred terrors shook the anxious mother's bosom whenever, through the circles of the dancers, she saw a dress more white than usual, a blonde head,

like that of Lilias, reveal itself; and there were of course many fair-haired girls. At last her suspense got too much for her. She left the sisters, under pretence of speaking to another old friend, but once free stole towards the door, and out upon the wide old staircase, which was full of sitters out. Mrs. Stormont escaped with difficulty from the too-zealous cavaliers, who were anxious to take her down for the cup of tea she professed to be in search of. She could hardly get free from their importunities. The door was wide open; the chill that comes before dawn was stealing in, but even when she looked out, shivering, from the threshold some officious person insisted on talking to her.

'Yes, yes, it is a fine night, and the moon is jnst beautiful—but, for my part, I think it's very cold, and I wish those incautious young creatures would not wander about like that, with nothing on them. If I could see Philip, I would send him out to beg them to come in.'

She stood on the step, drawing her shawl round her, looking out with great anxiety into the gloom. It was just trembling on the turn between darkness and light: ten minutes more would have betrayed to her what was taking

place under the shadow of the bushes—the change of partners once more in the little group at the corner of the house. But it is impossible to tell what a bound of relief Mrs. Stormont's sober heart gave when suddenly, coming forward into the light, she beheld the welcome figure of Lilias, all white and fair, leading rather than being led by Philip. There was a look which was half shame and half mischief in Lilias' eyes. She was a conscious deceiver, yet enjoyed the rôle. Her eyes were shining, dazzled with the light, as she came out of the darkness, a blush upon her face, a little shrinking from the gaze of the happy mother, who was so thankful to make sure that it was Lilias.

'Oh, my dear child,' she cried, 'is that you? and what do you mean, you selfish loon, by keeping her out in the cold?'

As she addressed him with this abusive expression, Mrs. Stormont laid her hand caressingly upon Philip's other arm. He had not looked so happy all the evening. She turned and went in with him, ordering her son to get his bonnie lady something to warm her after stravaighing like that in the dark. Poor lady! she did not see little Katie, her heart fluttering in her

throat, who stole in after, and hurried off to her mother, while the mistress of the feast had her back turned. Lewis took her back to Mrs. Seton very gravely, and Katie was frightened for once in her life, but presently, finding no harm come of it, shook herself free of all unnecessary tremors, and was flying over the floor with Alec Bannerman, who had been looking for her everywhere, as he was telling her when Mrs. Stormont came into the room radiant. That lady went back to the sisters, nodding her head with satisfaction.

'It was just as we thought,' she said. 'They were out for some fresh air, the monkeys! Fresh air!—it was like December! But I'm glad to tell you my boy had the sense to put a shawl upon her, and they're safe now in the tea-room, where I bade him give her some wine or something to warm her. So now your minds can be at ease.'

How much at ease her own was! She left them to seat herself beside another county lady, whose sons, poor soul, were wild, and gave her a great deal of trouble: and there discoursed, as women sometimes will, upon the perfections of her Philip, not without a gratified

sense that the other sighed over the contrast. But Margaret and Jean were not so much relieved as Mrs. Stormont.

'It is not like our Lilias,' Margaret said. 'I hope she will not learn these unwomanly ways. Out in the dark with a long-leggit lad like yon Philip, that his mother thinks perfection—I am disappointed in her, Jean.'

'It will have been some accident,' said Jean, cast down, yet faithful.

'Accident!—how could it be an accident? I hope it is not the appearance in her of any light-headedness. I would shut her up for the rest of her life if I thought that.'

'How can you think so, Margaret?' cried Jean, indignantly. 'There are no light-headed persons in our family.'

'But she is of her mother's family as well as ours,' said the elder sister, seriously. 'You can answer for your own blood, but never for another. Have you been out too, Mr. Murray? There is a breath about you of the caller air.'

'That is a pretty word, the caller air,' said Lewis. 'It is just upon dawn, and the birds will soon be singing; but I think it is too cold for the ladies to go out. They are very brave not to mind.'

'Brave!—I call it foolhardy; and, indeed, if it's on the turn of the dawning, as Mr. Murray says, I think, Jean, we should be making our way——'

'Margaret,' cried Lilias in her ear, 'I have got it upon me! Now I am going to dance every dance. It is just a sort of a fever, and, when you take it, it must run its course. Was this the dance you asked me for?' the girl said, turning and holding out her hand to Lewis. Her eyes were shining, her face full of animation, the thrill of the music in her frame.

Lewis was so much entranced gazing at her that he scarcely realised the boon she was offering him. Did she mean to turn his head? She who had refused half the people in the room, and now gave herself to him with this sweet cordiality. The sisters sat and looked at each other when the pair floated away.

'It is because she thinks him a stranger, and a little out of his element,' said Jean, ever ready with an apology.

'A stranger! He is just a beautiful dancer. Very likely he would be clumsy in a reel; but nobody dances reels nowadays. And as for those round dances (which I cannot say I ap-

prove of), he is just perfect. I don't wonder Lilias likes to dance with him. But I hope she will not just put things into his head,' Margaret said.

'Oh, no,' said Jean—'I don't think she will do that.'

It was not till two hours later, in the lovely early daylight, that the Miss Murrays left the Tower. Though there was not much room in the brougham, they sat close to take Mrs. Seton and her daughter into it, Katie, much subdued, sitting on Miss Margaret's velvet lap, upon the point lace which was almost the most valuable thing she possessed. The elder ladies talked a little, moralizing upon the perversity of human nature, which sent them home like this in their finery on the bonnie bright morning, when working folk were going out to their day's darg.

'If they would have the sense to begin early, as you do at your little tea-parties,' Miss Margaret said, graciously.

'But oh! we must make allowances for a ball. Yes, yes, there are so few of them in the county we may make allowance once in a way for a ball —and a grand ball, too, we must all admit; and the young people all enjoyed themselves just uncommonly,' cried Mrs. Seton.

When they were in the ferry-boat, Lilias desired to be allowed to get out of the carriage, and, with their fleecy white wraps about their heads, the girls went to the bow of the boat and stood in the fresh light looking out upon the silent river, which lay in that ecstasy of self-enjoyment, brooding upon all its shadows, and reflecting every gradation of light, which Nature is possessed by in hours when man is, so to speak, non-existent. The birds sang as if they had never known before what delight there was in singing, and were all trying some new carols in an enthusiasm of pleasure, breaking off and beginning again as if they had never sung them before this day. And the shadows were all made of light, as well as the illuminations, and everything was glorified in the water which reproduced the bank and the foliage and every sleeping cottage. There was a little awe in it, it was so bright, so limpid, and serene. Lewis, who was crossing with them, leaned over the side of the boat, and did not even speak when they approached him: and when Katie began her usual chatter, though even that was subdued, Lilias stopped her with a movement of her hand.

'They are all at their prayers,' said Lilias. She spoke, not quite knowing what she meant; for it is doubtful whether this is enough to express that supreme accord and delight of Nature in her awakening, before she has begun to be troubled by her unruly inmate, man.

But Katie was not to be restrained for long. She acquiesced for the moment, her little soul being influenced for about that space of time. Then she got her arm round that of Lilias, and drew her aside.

'It is very bonnie,' said Katie, 'but I must speak to you. You never came home from a ball in the morning before, or you would not be so struck with it. It's always like this, except when it is raining. Lilias, oh! I want to tell you; I will never forget what you did to-night, nor Philip either. He is just silly about it. He says that's what a good girl will do for a friend. I was just at the very end of what I could bear—I would have been hysterical or something. Fancy, bursting out crying in a ball-room! I believe I would have done it; I could not have put up with it a moment longer. That was why we went out upon the grass; it was very damp,' said Katie, looking at her slippers. 'I don't

know what mamma will say when she sees my shoes.'

'I wonder,' cried Lilias, half disgusted, 'that you can think about your shoes.'

'I am not thinking about them—I am thinking what mamma will think. But, Lilias, that's not what I was going to speak of. We will never, never forget it, neither him nor me.' (This is perfectly good grammar in Scotch, which was Katie's language, though she was not aware of it.) 'And, Lilias, do you think you would, just out of kindness, keep it up for awhile, like that?'

'Keep it up?—like what!' Lilias was bewildered, and looked in Katie's face for an explanation.

'Oh, surely you know what I mean. It would be no harm; I am the only person it could hurt, and it is I that am asking you to do it. Oh! Lilias, it is only to make Mrs. Stormont believe that it is you that Philip is after, and not me.'

'Katie, are you crazy? Me that Philip is—after! Oh! how can you say such vulgar things?'

'Why should it be vulgar?' said Katie, growing pale at this reproach; 'it is true. Philip has been after me as long as I can remember.

What would you have me say—in love? Oh! but to say that just gives you a red face—it makes your heart jump. It sounds like poetry.'

'And so it should, Katie; if it does not sound like poetry, it cannot be true.'

'It is very well for you to say that; in the first place, you have no one—after you; at least, not as yet. And then you are a grander person than I am. It might suit you to talk of love every day, but it would not suit me—oh, no! But that does not alter the thing; or, if you like to change the word, I am sure I am not heeding: if you will only, only—— Oh! Lilias, for the sake of friendship, and because we all knew each other when we were little things—if you would only let Mrs. Stormont think that he was in love with you!'

A flush of somewhat angry pride came over the face of Lilias. She drew her arm away from Katie's clinging grasp, which scarcely would consent to be detached.

'I don't know what you mean. I think you must want to insult me,' she cried.

'What good would it do me to insult you?' cried Katie, reproachfully. 'Instead of that I am just on my knees to you. Oh! don't you

see what I mean? We want to gain a little time. If *she* does not consent, nobody will consent, not even mamma, and never, never papa. They will not go against *his* mother. And Philip is very dour: he would quarrel with her, if it came to a struggle. That is what I am frightened for. If she thinks it is you, she will never stop him from coming. She will be so pleased, she will do whatever he likes, and we will be able to meet almost every day, and no suspicion. Oh! Lilias, what harm would it do you?' cried Katie, clasping her hands.

Lilias was taken entirely by surprise. Her action in the midst of the dance had been quite unpremeditated. She had been struck by sudden pity to see Philip so dark and gloomy, and little Katie, in her excitement, so near to self-betrayal. She looked with dismay now at the little pleading face, so childish, yet occupied with thoughts so different from those of a child. To think the elder ladies, Katie's mother, her own sisters, should be so near, and so little aware what was passing.

'How could I pretend anything like that?' she said. 'I would be ashamed. I could not

do it. And what would it come to in the end?'

'It would all come right in the end, if we only could have a little time,' said Katie. 'Oh, Lilias, here we are at the shore. Just say yes, or I will break my heart.'

'Why should you break your heart?' Lilias said, looking with dismay and trouble upon the little countenance just ready to dim itself with weeping, the big tears just gathering, the corners of the mouth drooping.

But next moment the boat grated on the shore. Lewis came forward to give them his hand. The brougham, with a little plunge and roll, came to land, and Mrs. Seton's voice was heard with its habitual liveliness and continuance.

'No, no, we'll not give you that trouble. We will just run home, Katie and I; it is no distance. No, no, I could not let you put yourself about for me, and Lilias in her satin shoes. Katie's are kid, and will take no harm. We are quite used to it; it is what we always do. Good night, or, I should say, good morning; and many thanks for bringing us so far. Katie, gather up your frock, we will be home in a minute,' Mrs. Seton said. 'No, no, Mr. Murray,

there is no need for you either. In a minute we will be at our own gate.'

Lilias stood in the clear morning light, looking after them as they hurried away, neglecting the call of her sisters and the attitude of Lewis, who stood waiting, holding open the door of the brougham. The still morning, the village street, without a creature moving, the sleep-bound look of the cottages, and the two figures disappearing like muffled ghosts into the lane which led to the manse, was like a story to the girl—a story into which she had stumbled somehow in the middle of it, but in which she was about to play a part against her will. She shivered a little with the excitement and bewilderment, and also because this fresh, clear, silvery air, so still, yet tingling with the merry twitter of the birds, was a little chill too.

'Lilias, Lilias, do not stand there. And the poor horse just dropping with sleep, and Sanders too.'

'And you will catch your death of cold,' added Miss Jean.

But it was Lewis holding out his hand to help her into the carriage who roused Lilias. He looked at her with an admiring sympathy,

so full of understanding and appreciation of her difficulty, as she thought, that it brought her back to herself. Had he heard what Katie had been saying? Did he know the strange proposal that had been made to her? She looked at him with a question and appeal in her eyes, and she thought he answered her with a re-assuring look of approval and consolation. All this was imagination, but it gave her a little comfort in her bewilderment. He put her into the carriage with a touch of her hand, which seemed to mean more than the mere little unnecessary help. It did mean a great deal more, but not what Lilias supposed; and then the slumberous old horse and old Sanders, scarcely able to keep his eyes open upon the box, got the old vehicle into motion again, and Lewis, too, disappeared like a shadow, the only one upon the silent road. Margaret and Jean looked like two ghosts, pale in the light of morning.

'Well, that is one thing well over—but as for sleeping in one's bed at this hour, with all the birds singing, it is just impossible,' Miss Margaret said.

## CHAPTER XIII.

NEXT morning Katie appeared at the old castle before Lilias had woke out of her first deep sleep. They had gone to bed after all, notwithstanding that Margaret pronounced it impossible, and even the two sisters were an hour late for breakfast. But it was now noon, and Lilias' windows had not yet been opened. Katie, who was, in comparison, well used to dissipation, contemplated her friend's privileges with admiration.

'Mamma will always make me come down to breakfast,' she said, plaintively. 'She just never minds. She says balls are all very well if they are never supposed to interfere with next day; and the consequence is I just feel as if I were boiled,' said Katie.

'You are looking just as usual,' said Miss Margaret.

Katie pouted a little at this re-assuring statement, but afterwards recovered, and begged leave to be allowed to carry up the cup of tea which was being prepared for the darling of the house.

'You may come with me,' said Miss Jean; 'but I must go myself, for I am afraid she may have got a cold after all the exposure last night.'

Katie went upstairs after Miss Jean, with various reflections upon the happiness of Lilias.

'I was exposed just the same. Oh! much more,' cried Katie to herself, 'but nobody thinks I can ever take cold.'

What differences there were between one girl and another! Mrs. Stormont would give her little finger if Philip would marry Lilias, and would not hear of Katie, though she was Philip's choice. These things were inscrutable. And the luxury of Lilias' room, the tray set down by her bed-side, the soft caution of the awakening, and Miss Jean's low tones, 'I have brought you your breakfast, Lilias.' Katie thought of her own case, called at seven as usual, in the room she shared with two little sisters, plagued by half a dozen appeals. 'Oh, will you tie my hair, Katie! Oh, will you fasten my frock!' when her eyes were scarce-

ly open. This it is to be an only child, an heiress, a lady of high degree. And, when Lilias opened her eyes and saw Katie beside her, her look of alarm was unquestionable. She jumped up from among her pillows.

'Is anything wrong?' she said.

'I just came,' said Katie, 'to talk over the ball. I thought you would want to talk it all over. When it is your first ball, it is not like any other. But we got home quite safe, and opened the door and were in bed without waking anyone. And *I* was up to breakfast as usual,' Katie said.

'Lilias is not used to such late hours,' said Miss Jean. 'She never was up so late in all her life, and neither Margaret nor I have seen the early morning light like that for years—except in cases of sickness and watching, which is very different. It was a great deal finer than the ball, though at your age perhaps it is not to be expected that you should think so.'

Katie opened her eyes wide, and gave Miss Jean a puzzled look. To be sure there were many agitations in her little soul that did not disturb a middle-aged existence. She was anxious to get rid of the elderly sister to pour out

her heart to the young one who could understand her.

'Don't you think it was a very nice ball?' said Katie. 'I never sat down once, and it was not too crowded, either. Oh! I like when you have no more room than just enough to get along. I don't mind a crowd. It makes you feel it's a real ball, and not just a little dance. Mr. Murray dances beautifully. Didn't you think so, Lilias? I saw you, though you refused so many people; and you danced three times with him, including——' Here Katie paused, with a blush and a sudden recollection of the presence of Miss Jean.

'Did I?' cried Lilias, with a look of great surprise. 'I did not think of it. I suppose that is what you call wrong, too, to dance with some one that is nice to dance with, instead of just taking anyone that comes?'

Lilias was somewhat proud of having carried her point. Her evening had been triumphant, in spite of her daring exercise of her right of choice.

'My dear,' said Miss Jean, mildly, 'everything depends upon the meaning you have. The like of Mr. Murray will never harm you; he is not

thinking of any nonsense. And he is a stranger; he has nobody belonging to him.'

Katie gave a little cough of dissent. It was all that she permitted herself. And Miss Jean did not leave the room till Lilias had taken, which she was nothing loth to do, the dainty little breakfast that her sister had brought her. This represented the very climax of luxury to both the girls, and Jean looked on benignant with a pleasure in every morsel her little sister consumed, which the most exquisite repast could not have given her.

'Now I will leave you to talk about your dances,' she said; 'but, Lilias, Margaret will like you to be up soon, and ready for your reading. We like you to have a good sleep in the morning, but not to be idle all day.' She gave them a tender smile as she went away. 'Now you will just chatter nonsense—like two birds in a bush,' she said. She could remember faintly, from her old girlish experiences, the talk about this quadrille and that country dance, for waltzes had scarcely penetrated into the country in Miss Jean's day, and about the new figures, and the new steps, and how So-and-so was a stupid partner, and So-and-so an amusing one. She thought she knew

exactly the sweet nonsense they would rush into, like two birds, she said, in the headlong twitter of domestic intercourse crowding their notes and experiences together, as the birds had done that morning, till the listeners felt as if they were eavesdropping. It would be like that, not much reason in it, one scarcely stopping to listen to the other, each full of her own reminiscences, a sort of delightful gibberish—but so sweet!

Instead of this, Katie ran to the doors, when Miss Jean departed, to see that they were all closed, and then rushed back and took her seat upon the bed, where Lilias was sitting up among her pillows, her fair locks streaming about her shoulders.

'Oh, I have so much to say to you, Lilias,' Katie cried, and threw herself upon her friend and kissed her. 'I should have hated to think of last night if it hadn't been for you. Oh! Lilias, you are just going to be our salvation.'

'How can that be?' said Lilias. 'I did not mean anything. Oh! Katie, never think about that any more. It was just a silly impulse—I did not mean it.'

'But when I ask you,' said Katie—'and when you know it will be so important for Phil and

me—and when you see the power you have, and that only you can do it—oh! Lilias, you will not turn your back upon me—you will stand our friend?'

'I should not turn my back on anyone,' said Lilias; 'but what am I to do, and how can I stand your friend? Just let me alone, Katie, please. I am too ignorant—I don't know about these sort of things. Philip and you should not be like that when everybody objects. I am sure I would not vex Margaret and Jean, not for any man.'

'That is all you know,' said Katie, shaking her head. 'That just means that you do not know the man. When your time comes, you will just carry on like the rest. And nobody said a word about Philip and me till it was too late. We were let to be together as much as we liked; he was for ever at the manse, and nobody said a word. If mamma was against it, she might have told me; but just to step in at the last and say, "We'll not allow it," and never a word of warning before, that is cruel,' Katie said, with an angry flash from her eyes. 'And now they think they can just part us as if we were two sticks!'

Lilias could not deny that there was reason in what was thus said.

'But you should have told your mother, Katie, before——'

'Told my mother!—do you think you can tell your mother all the nonsense that is said to you? Most part of it is just nonsense. I would think shame. When they speak of love and things like that, either you laugh, or—or—you put faith in it,' Katie said. 'It would not be fair to tell when you just laugh, and, when you believe, you think shame.'

Katie's little countenance, flushing and glowing, her little head shaken from time to time as she delivered these words of wisdom, her eyes full of many experiences, gave weight to what she said.

'But, Katie, you are younger than I am,' said Lilias, 'and where did you find out all that? It is Latin to me.'

'It is being in the world,' said Katie, with great gravity. 'You see, I am the eldest, and I was brought out very early, perhaps too early, but mamma did not think so. She always said, "Her sisters will just be on her heels before we know where we are," and that was how it was.

But I am not so young—I am seventeen,' said Katie, drawing herself up with the air of a woman of thirty. Her own private opinion was that a woman of thirty was approaching decrepitude, and no longer likely to interest herself in matters of the heart.

'I shall not be eighteen till August, and your birthday is——'

'Oh, what does it matter about a month or so?' said Katie. 'I am far, far older than you are: and if I were only six, that does not make it any easier; for here is Philip and me that they are wanting to separate, and we will never, never give each other up. And, Lilias,' she added, dropping into tender confidence after this little outburst, 'there is nobody that we put our faith in but you.'

Lilias turned her head away from her friend. She was touched by the appeal, and she felt, as every girl would feel, a thrill of pleasure in being believed in, and in the idea of being able to help. Who does not like to be a guardian angel, the only deliverer possible? But along with this there came a shiver of alarm. How could she undertake such an office, and what would Margaret say?

'I told you in the ferry boat,' said Katie, 'but you were sleepy.'

'Me! sleepy! when it was all so beautiful!'

'When you are up all night,' said the young philosopher, 'you never heed whether it is beautiful or not. But, any way, you did not understand. You were terrified, and then you thought it would bring you into trouble, and then——'

'I never thought it would bring me into trouble,' cried Lilias, indignant. 'I was not thinking of myself, and I was no more sleepy—! But to do something that is not true, to pretend—to cheat, for it would be cheating——'

'It would be nothing of the kind,' said Katie, indignantly. 'Do you think I'm asking you to go to Mrs. Stormont and tell her that Philip is in love with you? Oh! Lilias, don't be angry. It's just this. Let him come here sometimes—Miss Margaret would not mind; and then if you will come out with me for a walk in the afternoons? Oh! Lilias, it is not so much to do for a friend. It is quite natural that, when he sees you much, he should like you best. If he had never come to our house when he did, if he had never met me, if there had been no Katie at all,' said the girl, with pathos; 'of course it would have been

you that Philip would have thought of. There would never have been another fancy in his mind; he would have loved you, and all would have gone well. Oh! what a pity,' she cried, 'what a pity that ever, ever there was a Katie at all!'

'You are the silliest little thing in the world,' cried Lilias, starting up in her white night-dress, with her hair floating about her. 'All would have gone well? Oh! you think I would have taken Mr. Philip Stormont? You think Margaret would have let me? Was there nothing to do but for him to take a fancy to me? Oh! that is just too much, Katie; that is more than I can put up with,' she cried, with a spring on the floor. 'Will you go away, please, and let me get up?'

Katie was prudent, though she was offended, and she was determined to gain her point.

'I will go into the library and wait there,' she said. 'But oh! Lilias, why will you be so angry at me?'

'I am not angry, if you would not speak such nonsense,' Lilias cried.

'I will not speak nonsense, I will say nothing to displease you; but oh! Lilias, what will hap-

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all!'

'You are the silliest [illegible]
cried Lilias, starting up [illegible]
with her hair [illegible]
have gone well! [illegible]
take Mr. Philip [illegible]
garet would [illegible]
to do [illegible]
that is [illegible]
can put up [illegible]
floor. 'Will [illegible]
get up!'

Katie was [illegible]
and she was [illegible]

'I will go [illegible]
said. 'But oh! Lilias [illegible]
at me?'

'I am not angry [illegible]
nonsense,' Lilias [illegible]

'I will not speak [illegible]
to displease you [illegible]

pen to me if you turn your back upon me?' said the girl.

She went away so humbly, with such deprecating looks, that Lilias not only felt her anger evaporate, but took herself severely to task for her sharpness with poor little Katie.

'After all, she is a whole year younger than me, whatever she says,' Lilias said, sagely, to herself, 'and a year makes a great difference at our age.' Then her heart softened to Katie; if anything she could do would smooth over her poor little friend's troubles, what a hard-hearted girl she would be to deny it—'Me that does nothing for anybody, and everybody so good to me!' Lilias said in her heart. It began to seem to her a kind of duty to take upon her the task Katie proposed. If it did *them* good, it would do nobody harm. If Margaret got a fright and thought that she—she, Lilias Murray of Murkley—was going to fix her choice upon Philip Stormont, it would serve Margaret right for entertaining such an unworthy idea. 'Me!' Lilias cried, with a smile of profound disdain. But for Katie it was all very well. For Katie it was entirely unobjectionable. Philip was just the right person for her, and she for

him. Lilias made a short work of any romantic pretensions which the Stormonts might put forth as her sister could have done. What were they, to set up for being superior to the minister's daughter? The Setons were well born, for anything Lilias knew to the contrary, and the others were but small lairds, not great persons. Perhaps Mrs. Stormont's favourite claim upon her as one who might have been her mother had irritated the temper of the daughter of Lady Lilias Murray. She had a scorn of the pretensions of the smaller family. Katie was 'just as good,' she declared to herself. All this process of thought was going on while Lilias went through the various processes of her toilet. When she went into the book-room, which was sacred to her studies, and found Katie there, she gave her little friend a condescending kiss, though she did not say much. And Katie, who was very quick-witted, understood. She did not tease her benefactress with questions. She was ready to accept her protection without forcing it into words.

And no doubt, in the days that followed, Margaret and Jean were much perplexed, it might even be said distressed. Philip Stormont began to pay them visits with a wearisome pertinacity.

When he came he had not much to say; he informed them about the weather, that it was a fine day or a bad day, that the glass was falling, that the dew had been heavy last night, with many other very interesting scraps of information. But, when he had exhausted this subject, he fell to sucking the top of his cane. He was very attentive when anyone else spoke, especially Miss Margaret, and he looked at Lilias, perhaps as Katie had instructed him to look, with a gaze which indeed was more like anxiety than anything else, but which might do duty as admiration and interest with those who did not know the difference. To the outside spectator, who knew nothing about the conspiracy entered into by these young people, it would indeed have appeared very evident that Philip had been converted to his mother's opinion by the apparition of Lilias at the ball. And indeed the beauty of Lilias, like her position, was so much superior to that of Katie that nobody could have been surprised at the young man's change of opinion.

It might have been thought very natural too, that, after his early flirtations with the minister's daughter, whose mother brought her far

too much forward, his fancy should have turned legitimately in a higher direction as his taste improved. Mrs. Stormont heard of her son's proceedings with the liveliest delight, giving God thanks indeed, poor lady, in her deceived heart that He had turned her boy's thoughts in the right direction, and given her this comfort when she needed it most. And she also applauded somewhat her own cleverness in having seen the right means for so desirable an end, and secured the *début* of Lilias at Philip's ball, an event which connected their names, and no doubt would make them feel themselves more or less bound to each other. Mrs. Stormont felt that little Katie was routed horse and foot, and also that poor Mrs. Seton, whom she considered a designing woman and manœuvring mother (entirely oblivious of her own gifts in that kind) was discomfited and thrown out, a thought almost as sweet to her mind as that of Philip's deliverance. And it would be wrong to say that Mrs. Seton herself did not feel a certain sense of defeat. When she met Philip going up the village towards the castle, the smile and banter with which she greeted him were bitter-sweet.

'I am really glad to see that you are finding some entertainment at Murkley,' she would say. 'I have so often been sorry for you with nothing to occupy you. Yes, yes, whatever women may think, a young man wants something to amuse him; and the ladies at the castle are most entertaining. Miss Margaret has just an uncommon judgment, and dear Miss Jean, we are all fond of her: and as for Lilias, that speaks for itself. Yes, yes, Mr. Philip, with a face like that, there is nothing more to say.'

Philip listened to all this with wonderful composure. He secretly chuckled now and then at the ease with which everybody was taken in. 'Even her own mother,' he said to himself, with the greatest admiration of his Katie. Deception looks like a high art to the simple intelligence when it is exercised to his own advantage, and even the highest moralist winks at the artifices with which a couple of young people contrive to conceal their courtship. It is supposed that the supreme necessity of the end to be obtained justifies such means: at least that would seem to be the original cause of such a universal condonation of offence.

Miss Margaret did not share Mrs. Stormont's

sentiments. She had always been afraid of this long-leggit lad. He was just the kind of well-grown, well-looking production of creation that might take a young girl's eye, she felt, before she had seen anything better: and she blamed herself as much for permitting the ball as Philip's mother applauded herself for contriving it. Margaret was very far from happy at this period. The more Philip talked about the weather, and the more minute were the observations he made about the glass rising, or the dew falling, the more she looked at him, with a growing consternation, wondering if it were possible that Lilias could be attracted by such qualities as he exhibited.

'He is just a gomeril,' she said, indignantly.

'Indeed, Margaret,' Jean would say, 'he is very personable, there is no denying that.'

'He is just a great gowk,' growing in vehemence, Miss Margaret said.

But, in fact, her milder, less impassioned statement was, after all, the true one. His chief quality was that he was a long-leggit lad, a fine specimen of rural manhood. There was nothing wrong, or undersized, or ill-developed about him. He had brain enough for

his needs. He was far from being without sense. He had a very friendly regard for his neighbours, and would not have harmed them for the world. There was nothing against him; but then Lilias was the apple of the eye to these two ladies, who were entirely visionary in their ambition for her, and in all the hopes they had set on her head. That she should make a premature choice of one of whom all that could be said was, that there was nothing against him, was a terrible humiliation to all their plans and thoughts.

And in the afternoons, while July lingered out, with its warm days and rosy sunsets, the month without frost, the genial heart of the year, Lilias' walks were invariably accompanied by Katie, who, liberated as she was from visitors at home by Philip's desertion, ran in and out of the castle at all hours, and was the constant attendant of her friend. Philip would join them in their walks, which were always confined to the park, almost every day, and Lilias, at one moment or other, would generally stroll off by herself to leave them free. She got a habit of haunting New Murkley very much during these afternoon walks.

She would wander round and round it, studying every corner, returning to all her dreams on the subject, peopling the empty place with guests, hearing through its vacant windows the sound of voices and society, of music and talk. How it was that those half-comprehended notes which entranced Jean and had established so warm a bond of union between her and the young stranger at Murkley should always be sounding out of these windows, Lilias could not tell, for she had professed openly her want of understanding and even of interest. But, notwithstanding her ignorance, there was never a day that in her dreams she did not catch an echo, among all the imagined sounds of the great house, from some room or other, from some corner, of Lewis Murray's music. Perhaps it was that she met himself so often about this centre of her lonely wanderings.

Generous though Lilias was, and ready to sacrifice herself for the advantage of her friends, it is not to be supposed that when she left those two together to the mutual explanations and consultations and confidences which took so long to say, she herself found much enjoyment in the solitude even of her own words,

with the sense in her mind all the time that for the sake of the lovers she was deceiving her sisters, whom she loved much better, and in a lesser sense helping to deceive Katie's parents and Philip's mother, all of whom were more or less under the same delusion. It did not make Lilias happy; she fled to her dreams to take refuge from the questions which would assail her, and the perpetual fault-finding of her conscience. When Lewis appeared she was glad, for he answered the purpose of distracting her from these self-arraignments better even than her dreams; yet sometimes would be vexed and angry, disposed to resent his interest in the place as an impertinence, and to wonder what he had to do with it that he should go there so often and study it so closely, for he had always his sketch-book in his hand. She was so restless and uncomfortable that there were moments when Lilias felt her sense of propriety grow strong upon her, and felt disposed to treat the young man haughtily as an intruder, just as there were other moments when his presence was a relief, when she would plunge almost eagerly into talk, and betray to him, only half consciously, only half intentionally, the visions

of which her mind was full. There got to be a great deal of talk between them on these occasions, and almost of intimacy as they wandered from subject to subject. It was very different from the conversation which Lilias carried on with her other companions, though she had known them all her life—conversations in which matters of fact were chiefly in question, affairs of the moment. With Lewis she spread over a much wider range. With that curious charm which the mixture of intimacy and new acquaintance produces, the sense of freedom, the certainty of not being betrayed or talked over, Lilias opened her thoughts to the new friend, whom she scarcely knew, as she never could have done to those whom she had been familiar with all her life. It was like thinking aloud. Her innocent confidences would not come back and stare her in the face, as the revelations we make to our nearest neighbours so often do. She did not reason this out, but felt it, and said to Lewis, who was at once a brother and a stranger, the most attractive conjunction—more about herself than Margaret knew, or even Jean, without being conscious of what she was doing, to the great ease and consolation of her heart.

But one of these afternoons Lilias met him in a less genial mood. She had been sadly tried in patience and in feeling. Mrs. Stormont had paid one of her visits that day. She had come in beaming with triumphant looks, with Philip in attendance, who, in his mother's presence, was even less amusing than usual. Mrs. Stormont had been received with very cold looks by Margaret, and with anxious, deprecating politeness by Jean, who feared the explosion of some of the gathering volcanic elements; and Lilias perceived to her horror that Philip's mother indemnified and avenged herself on Jean and Margaret by the triumphant satisfaction of her demeanour towards herself, making common cause with her, as it were, against her elder sisters, and offering a hundred evidences of a secret bond of sympathy. She said 'we,' looking at Lilias with caressing eyes. She called her by every endearing name she could think of. She made little allusions to Philip, which drove the girl frantic. And Philip himself sat by, having indeed the grace to look terribly self-conscious and ashamed, but by that very demeanour increasing his mother's urbanity and her triumph. Lilias bore this while she could,

but at last, in a transport of indignation and suppressed rage, made her escape from the room and from the house, rushing out into the coolness of the air and silence of the park, with a sense that her position was intolerable, and that something or other she must do to escape from it. So far from escaping from it, however, she had scarcely got out of sight of the windows when she was joined by Katie, whose fondness and devotion knew no limits, and who twined her arm through that of Lilias with a tender familiarity which made her more impatient still.

The climax was reached when Philip's steps were heard hurrying after them, and Lilias knew, as if she had seen the scene, what must have been the delight of Mrs. Stormont as he rose to follow her, and what the dismay and displeasure of Margaret and Jean. She seemed to hear Mrs. Stormont declare that 'like will draw to like' all the world over, and to see the gloom upon the face of her mother-sisters.

'Oh! Lilias,' Katie cried, 'here he is coming; he can thank you better than I can; all our happiness we owe to you.'

Lilias turned blazing with quick wrath upon her persecutor.

'Why should *you* be happy,' she cried, 'more than other people—and when you are making me a liar? Yes, it is just a liar you are making me!'

'Oh, Lilias, you are just an angel!' cried Katie, 'and that is what Philip thinks as well as me.'

'Philip!' cried Lilias, with a passion of disdain. She cast a look at him as he came up, of angry scorn, as if his presumption in forming such an opinion was intolerable. She drew her arm out of Katie's almost with fury, pushed them towards each other, and walked on swiftly with a silent step of passion which devoured the way. She was so full of heat and excitement that, when she reached the new house of Murkley, and almost stumbled against Lewis, who was standing against a tree opposite the door, she gave a start of passion, and immediately turned her weapons against him. She cast a glance of angry scorn at the sketch-book in his hand.

'Are you here, Mr. Murray?' she cried, 'and always your sketch-book, though I never see you draw anything. I wonder what you come for, always to the same spot every day; and it cannot be of any interest to you.'

Lewis, who had not been prepared for this sudden attack, grew red with an impulse of offence, but checked himself instantly.

'You have entirely reason,' he said, with his hat in his hand, in his foreign way. 'I do nothing; I am not, indeed, worth my salt. The sketch-book is no more than an excuse; and it is true,' he added, ''that I have no right to be here, or to claim an interest——'

There is nothing that so covers with discomfiture an angry assailant as the prompt submission of the person assailed, and Lilias was doubly susceptible to this way of putting her in the wrong. She threw down her arms at once, and blushed from head to foot at her own rudeness.

'Oh, what was I saying?' she cried—'what business have I to meddle with you, whether you were sketching or not? But it was not you —it was just vexation about—other things.'

His tone, his look (though she was not looking at him), everything about him, expressed an indignant partizanship, which went to Lilias' heart.

'Why should you have any vexation? It is not to be borne!' he cried.

Lilias was so touched with this sympathy that it at once blew her cloud away, and made her

feel its injustice more than ever, which is a not unusual paradox of feeling.

'Oh, what right have I to escape vexation?' she said. 'I am just like other people.' And then she paused, and, looking back, saw the two figures which she had abandoned in such angry haste turning aside into the woods. They cared nothing about her vexation, whoever did so. She laughed in an agitated way, as though she might have cried. There was no concealing her feelings from such a keen observer. 'I suppose,' she said, 'that you are in the secret too?'

'I am in no secret,' said Lewis, and his eyes were full of indignation; 'but that you should be made the scapegoat—oh, forgive me! but that is what I cannot persuade myself to bear.'

'Ah!' said Lilias, 'how nice it is to meet with some one who understands without a word! But I am no scapegoat—it is not quite so bad as that.'

'It ought not to be so at all,' Lewis said, with a touch of severity that had never been seen in his friendly face before.

Lilias looked at him with a little alarm, and with a great deal of additional respect. And then she began to defend the culprits, finding

them thus placed before a judge so much more decided than herself.

'They don't think I mind—they don't mean to hurt me,' she said.

'But they do hurt you—your delicate mind, your honour, and sense of right. It is much against my interest,' said Lewis, 'I ought to plead for them, to keep it all going on, for otherwise I should not see you, I should not have my chance too; but it is more strong than me. It ought not to be.'

Lilias did not know what to answer him. His words confused her, though she understood but dimly any meaning in them. His chance, too!—what did he mean? But she did not ask anything about his meaning, though his wonder distracted her attention, and made her voice uncertain.

'It is not so bad for me as it would be for them,' Lilias said.

And then his countenance, which she had thought colourless often and unimportant, startled her as he turned towards her, so glowing was it with generous indignation. She had used the same words herself, or at least the same idea, but somehow they had not struck her in their full meaning till now.

'Why should they be spared at your expense? But you have no hand nor share in it,' he said. 'We must bear our own burdens.'

'But, Mr. Murray,' said Lilias, 'what should you think of a friend that would not take your burden upon her shoulders and help you to bear it?' The argument restored her to herself.

'I should think such a friend was more than half divine,' he said.

Lilias knew very well that she was not half divine, and Katie's declaration that she was an angel roused nothing but wrath in her mind; nevertheless she was curiously consoled in her troubles by this other hyperbole now.

## CHAPTER XIV.

'THIS will never do,' said Miss Margaret to Miss Jean.

They were sitting together with very serious faces after the triumphant departure of Mrs. Stormont, who had declared with a countenance full of smiles that to wait for Philip would be nonsense, since 'when these young creatures get together there is no telling when we may see them again.' The ladies had listened with grave looks, presenting a sort of blank wall of disapproval to their visitor's effusiveness, and when she had been seen to the door with stern politeness and cleared, as it were, out of their neighbourhood, they had returned and sat down for a few minutes without speaking, with many thoughts in their hearts.

'No,' said Miss Jean, deprecating yet decided. 'It is very natural, no doubt, on her side; but to expect you to be pleased with it——'

'Pleased with it! What is there to be pleased with?' cried Miss Margaret. 'It is just a plot and a conspiracy—that is what it is, and Lilias has no more to do with it than you or me.'

'If I thought that, Margaret——'

'If you just apply your mind to it, you will soon see that. She could not put up with that woman's petting and phrasing. If we had not brought her up to politeness, she would have said something. She just flew off when she could bear it no longer. And then that long-leggit Philip—if it had not been a look from his mother, he would not even have had the spirit to go after her. That woman is just a——'

'Oh! whisht, Margaret. I would not call her *that woman;* long-leggit or not, he is just her son, and she thinks much of him. Very likely,' said Jean, 'she thinks it would be a grand thing for Lilias if——'

'The impertinence of her is just boundless!' Margaret said; 'but we cannot let ourselves be beaten and put out of all our plans, and our bonnie Lilias turned into just a common country laird's wife—not for all the Mistress Stormonts and all the long-leggit loons in Scotland!'

When Miss Margaret was excited, it was her

habit to take advantage of a few strenuous words of what she would have called 'broad Scots.' She was no more Scotch perhaps at these moments than in her most dignified phraseology, to a southern ear; but to herself the difference was intense, and marked a crisis. It was as if she had sworn an oath.

'No, no, Margaret,' said Miss Jean, soothingly —'no, no; we will never do that.'

'And how are we to help it if we sit with our hands in our laps?' Miss Margaret cried. She got up in her excitement and began to pace through the room, which was such a home of quiet, with its brown wainscot and the glimmer of its many windows, that this agitation seemed to disturb it as if it had been a living thing. Jean followed her sister's movements with anxious eyes.

'Oh! Margaret,' she said, 'I am not afraid, but you will think of something. If it was only me, it would be different; but, so long as there is you to watch over her——'

'What can I do, or anybody, if they will not be watched over, these young things?' Margaret said, sitting down as suddenly as she had sprung up. And then there was a moment of profound

silence, as if the very walls were relieved by the cessation of that thrill of human movement. They had seen a great deal worse, these old walls, bloodshed and violence, and struggle and tumult; they seemed to treat with contempt, in their old-fashioned experience, a mere question about the managing of a silly little girl, or even her wooing, which was less important still.

Lilias was of opinion that she had already put up with quite too much annoyance on the subject when she got home. She had taken with great docility and sweetness the disapproval of Lewis, and been grateful to him for taking her part; but when Katie fell upon her with tears and kisses, and Philip, standing by with confused looks, sucked his stick, and murmured an assent to the praises and entreaties poured upon her, Lilias had not been able to withstand the importance of the position and the benedictions of the lovers. What should they do without her? She herself was not disinclined, when it was thus put before her, to recognise the necessity for her help, and that without her they must be ruined altogether; such a catastrophe, she felt, must be averted at all hazards. 'It would just be my death,' Katie said, weep-

ing; 'and oh, Lilias, we have been brought up together all our lives, and how could you see me perish like that?' Philip did not count for much in the matter. He was not unwilling perhaps that there should be a question of some one perishing for his sake, but he wanted to enjoy his walks and talks with Katie. Lilias, however, was altogether subdued by the idea of a funeral procession, and all the black hat-bands tied up by white ribbons. She felt that, if Katie were to perish, it would be murder on her part. She yielded, notwithstanding her sense of wrong, and the disapproval of Lewis. After all, he had nothing to do with it —nobody had anything to do with it. If she chose to make herself a shield for the loves of Katie and Philip, it was her own business. Even Margaret had no right to interfere. But Lilias felt she had enough of it when she went home. She did not want to hear even the names of the people whom she was thus serving at so great a cost, and the remembrance of the scene with Mrs. Stormont and all her caresses was odious to her. She put it severely out of her mind. She resolved that for no inducement would she be present when Mrs. Stormont paid

another visit, and that Philip should never be permitted to accompany his mother to the castle. These things she would insist upon, and then nothing so disagreeable as this past afternoon could happen again.

She stole in, a little breathless, and desirous of getting to her room unperceived. The result of so much agitation was that she had lingered longer than usual. There had been Lewis in the first place, who had a great deal to say, and then the lovers, from whom she had broken away in anger, had taken a long time to reconcile her. It was late, accordingly, when she got in, and by the time she had changed her dress, and was ready to appear in the drawing-room, it was very late, and her sisters were both waiting for her. They did not say anything at that moment, but contemplated her with very serious looks during their evening meal. Even old Simon perceived that something was coming. He showed his sympathy to 'little missie' by offering her everything twice over, and anxiously persuading her in a whisper to eat.

'It will do you good, missie,' he said in her ear; 'you're taking nothing.' He even poured out some wine for her, though she never took

wine, and adjured her to drink it. 'It will just be a support,' he said.

These signs were not wanted to show Lilias that a storm was brewing. She was a little frightened, yet plucked up a courage when she heard Margaret clearing her throat. After all, she had done nothing that was wrong. But the form which the assault took was one which Lilias had not foreseen. They returned to the drawing-room before a word was said. By this time it was quite evening, the sunshine gone, and a twilight much more advanced than that out of doors lay in all the corners. Except the space in front of the windows, the room, indeed, was almost dark, and the bare walls seemed to contract and come close to hear what was going to be said.

'Lilias,' said Miss Margaret, 'Jean and I have been consulting about many things. You see, this is rather a dear place, there are so many tourists; and especially in the autumn, which is coming on, and the meat is just a ransom. Even in a little place like Murkley there are strangers, and Kilmorley just eats up all the provisions in the county.'

Lilias' heart, which had been beating high in

anticipation, sank down at this in her bosom with a delicious sense of relief and rest. There was nothing to be said then on any troublous subject, for who could be excited about the tourists and the price of meat? She was glad she had not taken the wine, for there could be no need for it—evidently no need.

'I don't know anything about that, Margaret,' she said. 'I wish there was no meat at all.'

'Yes, you are just a perverse thing about your eating,' said Miss Margaret—'we all know that.'

'And it is not good for you, my dear; it keeps you delicate,' said Miss Jean.

'Oh!' cried Lilias, springing from her chair, 'was that all you were going to speak to me about? And even Simon saw it, and brought me wine to drink to do me good; and it is only about the price of meat and provisions being dear! What do you frighten people for, if it is nothing but that?'

If Lilias had been wise, she would have perceived by Margaret's serious looks and the wistful sympathy in Jean's face that she was far as yet from being out of the wood; but, after the little bound of impatience which was

habitual to her, she calmed down immediately, and made them a curtsey.

'I don't know what is dear and what is not dear,' she said.

'Ah,' said Margaret, shaking her head, 'but if you were to marry a poor man, or into a struggling family that have more pretensions than they have money, you would soon have to change your mind about that. You would have to study what was dear and not dear then. You would have just to spend your life in thinking what he would like, and what they would put up with, and the price of butter, and how many eggs your hens were laying. I'm not averse to such things myself, but how the like of you would win through it——'

'I suppose,' said Lilias, 'when there is need for it, there is nobody who cannot do that?'

'Oh, Lilias, that is far from being the case, my dear,' said Miss Jean. 'It takes a great deal of thought, just like other things. Margaret there has just a genius——'

'It was not me we were speaking of,' said Margaret. 'I don't wish you to be exposed to that. It is a hard life for any young girl; and you have been bred with—other thoughts. I

don't wish you, Lilias, to be exposed to that.'

'You speak as if I wished it,' said the girl. 'Do I want to be poor? What I want is to be rich, rich! to have a great fortune, and finish the house, and fill it with people, and live like a lady——'

'You might do that without being rich,' said Miss Jean, softly, which was a sentiment quite inappropriate to the occasion, and at which Margaret frowned.

'Well, that is a digression,' the elder sister said. 'We cannot tell whether you are to be rich or poor—we must just leave that in the hands of Providence; but in the meantime, not just to be ruined and over-run with those tourist cattle, I was thinking, and Jean was thinking, that if we were to retire a little and economize, and save two or three pounds before we go to London—to Gowanbrae.'

'To Gowanbrae!' said Lilias, wondering, scarcely comprehending.

'My dear,' they both said together, 'it will be far better for you. You will never be free of engagements here,' Margaret went on, 'after that unfortunate weakness of mine about letting you go to Mrs. Stormont's, and then, you know,

we can face the winter quietly, and get all our things together for the season. And—what is it, Lilias? What is it, my pet? What is it, my dear? Oh, Jean, you said true. It is breaking her heart.'

'Margaret! you will never be hard upon our darling—even if you cannot approve——'

Here Lilias, who had flung herself upon her elder sister, with her arms round her neck, sprang apart from her again, clasping her hands together with the impatience of a child.

'What is it you are saying about me?' she said. 'Breaking my heart! when I am just like to dance with joy? Gowanbrae! that is what I want, that is exactly what I want. Oh, yes, yes, let us go, let us go to-morrow, Margaret. That will put everything right.'

They sat in their high-backed chairs, looking at her like two judges, yet not calm enough for judges, full of grave anxiety yet tremulous hope. Margaret put up her hand to check Jean, who showed an inclination to speak.

'Not a word,' she said, 'not a word. Lilias, this is more serious perhaps than you think. All our plans and all our thoughts are for you. It's your good we are thinking of. But

don't you trifle with us. When you say *that*, is it out of some bit quarrel or coolness? or is it to cheat your own heart? or is it a real conviction that it is for your safety and your good to go away?'

Lilias stamped her foot upon the floor. She clenched her hands in a little outburst of passion.

'Oh! you are just two—— Oh! what are you making such a fuss about? It is neither for a quarrel nor for safety (safety! Am I in any danger?) nor for any other silly thing. It is just because I want to go. Oh, Gowanbrae! We have not been there for two years. I like it better than any place in the world. That was what I was pining for all the time, only I could not remember what it was!'

'It was just a little change she was wanting, Margaret,' Miss Jean said.

Margaret did not make any immediate reply. She kept her eyes upon Lilias as a physician keeps his finger upon a pulse.

'You will get your wish then,' she said. 'This takes away the only doubt I had; and now we're all of one mind, which is a wonderful blessing in a house. As soon as the washing

is done, and the things ready, we'll start; for that will just give them time to put up the curtains, and put everything right.'

This was a somewhat dry ending to so emotional a discussion, but Miss Margaret, who was not fond of scenes, considered it best to restore everything to its matter-of-fact basis as quickly as possible.

'Go away, and play some of your music,' she said to her sister, in an undertone, 'and don't just carry this on, and put nonsense into people's heads.' She took up her stocking, which she had dropped. 'Bless me,' she said, 'how much shorter the days are growing, though we are only in July. Gowanbrae is just beautiful in the autumn, and warm for the winter. Your old castle, Lilias, is grander, but there is more sun in the south country.'

'Margaret, if you will make comparisons, I shall have to stand up for Murkley,' cried Lilias. 'But I like the one just as well as the other, winter and summer.'

'Which is all that is necessary,' said Miss Margaret, nodding her head. 'Now take your book or something in your hands to do, for I cannot bide to see a young person sitting idle.

It's not becoming either in young folk or old; and work is best, in my opinion; for doing nothing but reading books just bewilders the brain,' Miss Margaret said.

Nevertheless, it was with a book in her arms that Lilias stole into the window, where Miss Jean usually sat with her work. She took the book, but she did not read. It was now dark enough to conceal from the quick eyes of Margaret how far she was carrying out her injunction, and Lilias was in so considerable a commotion of mind that she was glad to retire into her own thoughts. Jean's music made no very strong appeal to either of her listeners. She sat in the further part of the room in the dimness, scarcely perceptible, and filled the silence with soft strains which formed a sort of accompaniment to thought, and did not interrupt it. Miss Margaret in the middle of the room, with such light as remained centering in her face and the hose upon her hand, sat motionless in her high chair. She had allowed her stocking to drop upon her lap; though she had made that protestation against idleness, she was herself doing nothing. Perhaps she was listening to the music, for now and then she would say,

'That is a very bonnie thing you have just been playing,' or, 'What was that? for I liked it, Jean.' She said this, however, night after night, at the same place, so that it is to be feared she did it purely out of sympathy, and not from any appreciation of the 'bonnie thing' of which she desired so often to know the name.

The soft shadows gathered over the group thus composed. Lilias in the window, her profile showing against the light, sat in a hush of relief and calm, never stirring, half conscious only of the dim background, of Margaret in the chair, and Jean at the piano; other pictures were before her eyes. Katie all in tears, hearing with consternation the news of this unlooked-for change; Philip sucking his cane; Lewis—— Ah! she could not but wonder a little what Mr. Murray would think of it. He would be glad, no doubt; he would approve; he would think it a good thing that she should go away, and no longer be a screen to the lovers. Then Lilias wondered a little, with a faint sense of mingled amusement and—no, not regret. Why should she regret or care at all about it? He was Jean's friend, not hers. But it was not possible not to be moved by a question or two in respect

to him. Would he go to New Murkley as often, would he stand with his sketch-book in his hand never drawing a line, would he take as much interest in it all when she was no longer there? A faint smile woke about the corners of her mouth. Nobody could see it to ask what she was smiling at. To such a question she would have answered, 'Nothing,' and it was nothing, only a vague, amused wonder in her own mind. He would be glad she was going away, but—— The road through the park and the grass-grown spaces round the great empty house, would no one at all linger about them now? Not Katie, who could no longer have the excuse of coming to her friend, nor Philip, whom no doubt his mother, much disappointed, would keep a closer hold upon than ever. But Lilias did not care so much about them. What would the other do, who was a stranger, who took such an interest in the vacant palace? The smile continued upon her face; perhaps, though she said 'No, no!' vehemently to herself, there was a slight sensation of regret, a little blank in her heart. She wondered whether it would all come to an end? whether, when the fishing was over (but he did not care for the fishing), he would

disappear and be seen no more? or whether he would turn out to be somebody, and to have a real interest in Murkley? He might be, not the Australian cousin, but perhaps a son of that superseded benefactor, secretly inspecting his cousins before he disclosed the link of kindred; he might be—— But here Lilias turned back again, quite illogically, breaking her self-argument off in the middle, to repeat all these wonderings from the beginning. Would he drop out of their knowledge when they left Murkley? would they ever see him again? what would happen? But why should anything happen? No doubt he would just go away when it began to grow dull in Murkley, and be seen no more. Lilias had a consciousness that it would grow very dull in Murkley when she herself went away, and perhaps it was this that made her, after the first moment of pleasure with which she had heard of the proposed change, feel something that it would be wrong to call sadness—a little blank, a subdued sensation of regret, not for herself, as if she were leaving anything, but for the others. And of course it would be the stranger, he who had no other thing to amuse him, who would feel it most.

The news of the revolution and radical change of all the conditions of life which had thus been decided upon reached the stranger with the utmost promptitude and distinctness. Miss Margaret herself was not aware of having revealed it to anyone but her confidential maid when it came like a thunderbolt upon Lewis, something which it had not entered into his mind to fear. He had been engaged all the morning in finishing a sketch of New Murkley which he meant to offer—to Lilias, if permitted—if not, to her sisters, and which he had hoped would bring about some new *rapprochement*, some further step in the intercourse which had as yet so little sanction from the heads of the house, and which he was almost nervously anxious to reveal; for even his own chance meetings with Lilias, which had followed in the train of the other imprudent business to which she had given her protection, troubled the young man's conscience and aroused his prejudices, although against himself. He was as anxious to get the sanction of authority for these meetings, and even to betray himself, as Philip was to shelter in the slender shadow of Lilias and keep his real wooing secret. This had kept

him from his usual morning saunter by the river-side, and, when Adam arrived late for his dinner with a basket of trout, Lewis, who had heard Janet's not very amiable greeting of her husband from the open window, went down to see the results of the fisherman's morning work. It was not very great, and Janet stood with a disproportionately large *ashet** in her hand, which she seemed to have chosen from the biggest in her possession, while Adam took from his basket deliberately one by one a few small fish. She greeted each as it appeared with a little snort.

'Well, that was worth the trouble! Eh, but that's just grand for a day's work! It shows the valley o' a man to see that.'

'Ye talk about the valley o' a man that ken nothing about it,' said Adam, 'the smawller they are they gi'e the mair trouble whiles. But here is ane that was a dour ane,' he added, after a pause, producing at last a fish of reasonable size. 'He's taken me maist of my mornin'. Up the water and down the water he's tried a' the ways o't. A fish is a queer beast: it has nae sense o' what's possible. Would

* A dish, from the French *assiette*.

you or me, Mr. Murray, think life worth leevin' with a hook through our jaws? though I will not say but there are human creatures that gang through it little better off.'

'Some would be a' the better for a hook through their jaws; it would keep them from havering,' said Janet, tartly.

'Diel a bit. No if it was a woman, at least, wha will haver till her last breath, if she had all the lines in Tay grippit to that souple jaw o' hers. But you would think,' said Adam, dropping into his usual tranquil strain after this outburst, 'that a trout, gey high up as I have heard in the awquatic organisations, would have the sense to ken that a glancing, darting thing like a fishing-line with a far cleverer cratur at the other end o't——'

'Eh, but the troutie would be sair deceived! ye mean a blind, blundering cratur that a bit thing like this can lead a bonnie dance up the water and down the water, as you say yoursel'. Fishes maun ha'e their ain thochts like the rest o' us, and ye mightna be flattered if ye heard them, for a' you think so little o' their opinion.'

'The inferior creation,' said Adam, calmly, 'have a' their bits o' blasphemies against man,

who is their lord and master; but nobody could think little o' the opinion, if ye could get at it, of a cratur that had such a warstle for its life. Think o' a' the cunning, and the cleverness, and what you would ca' calculation, and its wiles and its feints to draw aff your attention. Na, I canna have a gallant beast like that put into a frying-pan in my house.'

'Then, Mrs. Janet,' said Lewis, always courteous, 'you will put it in a basket and send it to the castle, and I will tell the ladies that it is a hero, or a great general, to be eaten tenderly.'

'My poor young gentleman,' said Janet, with a sort of compassionate contempt, 'whatever you have to send to the Misses, you must send it soon, soon! for a' is settled and packit, and they're starting for the south country.'

'The south country!' said Lewis, in dismay. The announcement was so sudden that it bewildered him, and, once more deceived, he thought of Italy. 'But why—what is the matter? What has happened?' he cried; 'they are not *poitrinaires.* Ah, I forgot, it is something else you mean by the south.'

'I mean just their ain house, that is near Moffat, a bonnie enough place, but no like

Murkley. I thought, sir, you would have heard,' said Janet, fixing her eyes upon him. She had become greatly devoted to her lodger, but human curiosity is stronger even than affection, and she was anxious to know how he would take this blow which, she felt sure, would crush all his hopes.

And, indeed, Lewis grew a little pale; his surprise was great, a sickening disappointment came over him; but yet, along with it, a certain relief. His mind had been greatly disturbed by the existing position of affairs. He had a passing sense that he was glad in the midst of his downfall. Janet could not comprehend how this was.

'It must be very sudden,' he said, moistening his lips, which the sudden shock had made dry: and he grew pale, and his face lengthened; but nevertheless he had a smile which contradicted these signs, so that the keen observer at his side was at a loss.

'The mair need to lose no time with the trout,' said Adam; 'and, besides, it's always best caller from the water. Janet, have ye a basket? I'll take it up mysel'.'

'Oh, ay, onything that means stravaighin','

said Janet, bitterly. 'Just gi'e a glance round ye, my man, and see if ye canna capture a basket for yersel'.'

But these passages of arms amused Lewis no more. He walked upstairs very gravely into his parlour, where his sketch stood upon a small easel. Would there not be time even to finish it? His face had grown a great deal longer. This was an end upon which he had not at all calculated: and somehow an end of any kind did not seem so desirable as it had done an hour ago, when none seemed likely. The reign of Philip and Katie, after all, was not, perhaps, so much harm.

## CHAPTER XV.

IT was curious how the aspect of everything had changed to Lewis when he walked up the now familiar way to the old Castle of Murkley through the sunshine of the July afternoon. It was still full summer, but there seemed to him a cloud in the air—a cloud too subtle to show upon the brightness of the unsympathetic blue, but which indicated storm and change. The trees were almost black in the fulness of their leafage, dark green, no tender tints of spring lingering among them, as there had still been when he first came to the little village on the river-side, and first saw those turrets sheltered among the trees. What a difference since then! The unknown, with all its suggestions, had disappeared; he was aware what he was likely to meet round every corner. But the excitement of a life in suspense had only been

intensified. When he came to Murkley, with the virtuous intention of bestowing himself and his fortune upon one of old Sir Patrick's disinherited granddaughters, there had been no very entrancing expectations in his mind. He had not thought of falling in love, but of accomplishing his duty. That duty he would have been happy to have accomplished under the gentle auspices of Miss Jean. He would never have grumbled at the twilight life he should have spent with her; no such radiant vision as Lilias had ever flitted across his imagination, nor had he expected, in case his suit should be rejected (a possibility which at first, indeed, he had not taken into account), to return with anything less agreeable than that calm sense of having done his duty which consoles a man for most small disappointments. But now all this was changed. In the case he had supposed beforehand, a refusal would have been an emancipation. He would have felt that he had done all he could, and was now free to enjoy unfettered what he had felt the justice of sharing, should they please, with one of the natural heirs. But Lewis felt now that the whole question had been opened, and did not know where he might

find himself, or what he might feel to be his duty if he failed now. It had been easy to put all that aside when he knew that Lilias was near him, that he had the same chance as all her countrymen, and was free to speak to her, to exercise what charms he might possess. Every decision was stopped naturally, every calculation, even, until it appeared whether in this supreme quest he might have good fortune. But when she should be gone, what would happen? When she should be gone, the glory would be gone out of everything. Murkley would turn into a dull little village, full of limited rural people, and his own life would appear as it was, a mere exotic, without meaning or rule. There was a meaning in it now, but then there would be none.

He walked up the village street with that suddenly elongated countenance, feeling that everything was crumbling about him. The children with their lintwhite locks, the fowls sheltering beneath the old cart turned up on the roadside, the slow, lumbering figures moving about across the fields and dusty roads, struck him for the first time with a sense of remoteness. What had he to do among them? It

was impossible to imagine anything more entirely unlike the previous tenor of his life, and if he failed—if he did not succeed in the suit which, as soon as he thought of it, seemed to him preposterous, what would his life become? Whatever it was, it would be very different from Murkley, and any existence that was possible there. Accordingly it was not only his love that might be disappointed, but his life, which probably would entirely change. Very few men have this to contemplate when they think of putting their fortune to the touch, unless it is those men who take up marriage as a profession, a class fortunately very few.

The ladies were all in, Simon said. He had made an alteration in his appearance which revealed a high sense of the appropriate. He had an apron upon his person, and several straws at his feet, which he stooped to pick up.

'You'll excuse us, sir, if we're not just in our ordinary,' Simon said. 'You see we're packing.' A hope that he would be the first to tell it, and that explanations might be demanded from him, gave vivacity to Simon's looks. But he relapsed into gravity when Lewis, with that long face, gravely replied that

he was very sorry, and that it must have been a sudden resolution. 'Things is mostly sudden, sir,' said Simon, with a dignified sense of superiority, 'in a lady's house. Miss Jean is in the drawing-room, but Miss Margaret is up the stair.'

Lewis stood, with his heart beating, under the old man's calm inspection.

'I am going to see Miss Jean,' he said, 'but afterwards will you ask, Simon, if Miss Murray will grant me an interview. There is something—I wish to ask her.'

'Lord bless us!' said Simon, 'you'll no be meaning——'

And then he stopped short, eyeing Lewis, who stood half angry, half amused under this inspection. The old servant's eyes had a twinkle in them, and meant much, but he recollected himself in time.

'You'll be meaning Miss Margaret,' he said. 'I'll allow it's ridiculous, with the two leddies here; but the one that is Miss Murray according to all rights is Miss Lilias—for she is Miss Murray of Murkley, and the other two leddies, they're just the Miss Murrays of Gowanbrae. That was, maybe, the General's fault: or, maybe,

just his wisdom and far-seeingness; for he was a clever man, though few saw it. Old Sir Patrick, the old man, he was just the very devil for cleverness,' Simon said.

This did not sound like a servant's indiscretion, but the somewhat free opinion of a member of the family, which was how Simon considered himself. He made a little pause, contemplating Lewis with a humorous eye, and then he said,

'I'll take ye to Miss Jean, sir, and then I'll give your message to Miss Margaret. I will say in half an hour or three quarters of an hour, that they may be sure not to clash.'

'That will do very well,' said Lewis, not knowing why it was that Simon twinkled at him with so admiring an eye.

The old servant smote upon his thigh when he had introduced the visitor into the drawing-room.

'If one will not do, he'll try the other. But, Lord save us, to tackle Miss Margaret! Eh, but yon's a lad of spirit,' Simon said. For the little episode of the devotion of Lewis for Miss Jean had not passed unobserved by the keen eyes of the domestic critics. They under-

stood what had happened as well as Lewis, and considerably better than Jean did, though with consternation, not knowing what the young man's object could be. No doubt he had thought that she was the one that had the siller, they concluded, but his desire to have an interview with Miss Margaret convulsed the house with wonder.

'Miss Margaret will soon give him his answer,' said the cook, indignant. 'I would have turned him about his business, if it had been me, and tellt him our ladies werena in.'

'Would you have had me file my conscience with a lee?' said Simon; and then he added, with a chuckle, 'I wish the keyhole was an honest method, or I could get below the table. I would sooner see them than ony play.'

'She will send him away with a flea in his lug,' said the angry cook.

Meanwhile Lewis, unsuspecting that his designs were so evident, went into the drawing-room, where Miss Jean sat as usual. She gave him her usual gentle smile.

'Come away,' she said, 'Mr. Murray. I am very glad to see you. I should have sent for you, if you had not come. For it will not be

much longer I will have the pleasure—— We are going away from Murkley for a time. It is sudden, you will think, but that is just because we have kept it to ourselves. Murkley is just a terrible place for gossip,' Miss Jean said.

There was a little pause. It was one of those crises in which there is much to say, but no legitimate means of saying it. 'I am very sorry,' said Lewis. Miss Jean, on her side, was much embarrassed, for somehow it seemed to her that she had acted unkindly, and forgotten the claims of this young man who threw himself in so strange, yet so trusting, a way on her consideration. The events of the former interview, in which there had been so much agitation, she had never formally explained to herself. The shyness of her sweet old-maidenhood had eluded the question. She had never asked herself what he meant, or why it was that she had taken the extreme step of narrating to him the history of her own love. She had done it by instinct at the moment, and the doing of it had agitated and occupied her mind so much that she scarcely thought of Lewis. But

she had retained a warmer kindness for him, a sense of having more to do with him than the others had, and she felt now as if she had deserted him, almost betrayed his trust in her.

'You see,' she said, a little anxiously, 'we are not just free agents, Margaret and me. There is always Lilias to think of. What is good for her is the thing we are most guided by: and we think a change will be good for her.'

'And I am sure you are quite right in thinking so,' said Lewis, hastily. It was a thing he had no right to say. He reddened with embarrassment and alarm when he had thus committed himself, and said, hurriedly, 'Everything, of course, must give way to that.'

'You have thought her looking—pale? That is just what we have been thinking, Margaret and me. And what is a very good thing is, that she's fain, fain to go to Gowanbrae herself. That is our little place in the south country, Mr. Murray. I am sure that if you were—passing that way at any time, Margaret would be very glad to see you.' Jean said this, however, with but a half assured air, and continued, hurriedly, 'It

would be taking much upon ourselves to say you would perhaps miss us: for you have many friends already in this country-side, and this house is a very quiet house for you to find pleasure in; but it vexes me just to cease to see you when we were beginning to know you.'

'I will come to—the south country—with pleasure,' said Lewis; then he added, seeing her hesitation, 'We shall meet, perhaps, in town.'

'That will be the surest,' said Miss Jean, brightening; 'we will be there by March, from all Margaret says. So far as she can hear, that is the time when the drawing-rooms begin. If you are in London, that will just be a great pleasure to look forward to, Mr. Murray. Dear me! to think of meeting you among strangers, and hearing you play, and all as if we were still at Murkley, in a great, vast, terrible place like yon London! And where shall we hear of you? You will have a club, or something. But, after all, what can that matter?' Miss Jean added, with gentle dignity; 'you will always be able to hear of the Miss Murrays of Murkley; and you will tell me where I can hear good music, that is one thing I am looking forward to.'

'Are you too busy? or may I play to you now?' he said.

'Oh, no, I could never be too busy,' said Miss Jean, 'and, as a matter of fact, I have nothing to take me up. Margaret is just a woman in a thousand. She thinks nobody can do a thing right but herself. I would be sitting with my hands before me but for this work that they all laugh at. And never, never could I be too busy for music,' she said, with a little sigh of satisfaction, turning her face towards the piano. Lewis was in that condition of suspense in which a man, with his mind all directed to the near future, is scarcely conscious what he is doing in the present. There had been a moment before in which his heart had beat very anxiously in this same room, but with a very different kind of anxiety from this. There lay before him then no dazzling possibility of happiness, but now the hurry and tumult in all his veins was moved by the knowledge that everything which was most beautiful in life was before him. He did not expect that he was to get it. He had no hope that Miss Margaret would open the doors of the house or the arms of the family to him. But the mere idea of de-

claring himself, of making the attempt, made his heart beat. It was almost certain, indeed, that he would be rejected, but he had learned now to know that no such injustice could be final. After Margaret, there was another tribunal. Parents might frown, yet it was always possible in England that the maiden herself would smile. He felt that, be the answer what it might, when he opened his lips this day he would open up the supreme question of his life. And yet, with this ferment in his being, he went to the piano to play to the gentle listener who was never too busy for music. He himself, though he was an enthusiast in his way, was too busy for it now; he could not hear the sounds that came out from under his fingers for the strong pulsations that beat in his heart and made every other sound indifferent to him. In consequence of this, it happened to Lewis to do what all artists have to do sometimes, whether man or woman, seeing that life is more urgent than art. He played with his hands not less skilfully, not less smoothly than usual, but he did not play with his soul, and of all people in the world Miss Jean was the most sensitive to the difference. She loved music not for its technicalities, or

for its execution, or for the grammar and correctness of its construction. She loved it for the soul of it, by instinct and not by purpose, and the fine dissatisfaction that arose in her when she felt it came to her from his fingers only is more than can be said. A veil of bewilderment came over her face. Was it her own fault? was her mind taken up with the excitement of the journey, the cares which she shared with her sister respecting Lilias? Miss Jean placed herself at the bar with a sort of consternation. But it was not she who was to blame. Had she received it as usual with serene satisfaction and delight, he would have continued for some time at least, anxious and excited though he was; but when the support of her faith was withdrawn, this became impossible. He stopped abruptly when he came to the end of the movement he was playing, broke into a wild fantasia, and finally jumped up from his seat after a great jar and shriek of outraged chords, holding out his hands in an appeal.

'Pardon!' he cried, 'pardon! I cannot play a note—it is too strong for me, and you have found me out.'

'You are not well,' she said, with ready sympathy, 'or there is something wrong.'

'There is this wrong,' he said, 'that I think all my life is going to be settled to-day. You, whom I have always revered and loved since I first saw you, let me tell it to you. Oh! not the same as what happened the other day when you stopped my mouth. I do not know what you will think of me, but it was not falsehood one way or another. I had scarcely seen her then. I have asked Miss Margaret for an interview, and this time it is for life or for—no, I will not be fictitious, I will not say death: for that is not how one dies.'

'An interview with Margaret?' Jean repeated after him. She grew a little pale in sympathy with his excitement. 'My poor lad, my poor lad! and what is that for?'

But she divined what it was for. For a moment it startled her indeed. That gentle sense of property, of a sort of possession in him, which was involuntary, which was the merest shadow of personal consciousness, disturbed and bewildered her for a moment. Was this what he had meant all along? It gave her a little shock of humiliation, not that he should have changed his mind, but that she should have mistaken him. How glad she was that she had

stopped him at once, that she had prevented all compromising words; but yet the possibility that she had been so ridiculous as to mistake as addressed to herself what was meant for Lilias, did touch Miss Jean's mind for a moment with a thrill of pain; the next she was herself again.

'It is Lilias you mean?' she said, in a low and tremulous voice.

He made no reply except with his eyes, in which there was an appeal to her for pardon and for help. He was too deeply moved and anxious, fortunately, to realise the ludicrous element in the situation, and, in his confusion and sense of guilt yet innocence, had no ridiculous admixture of the comic in his thoughts. Perhaps people are slow to see the humour in their own case: and Lewis had absolute trust in the patroness whom he addressed. Even had he supposed her to have a feeling of wrong in this quick transference of his suit, he would have opened his heart to her all the same. But he had no reason to suppose that Miss Jean could have any sense of wrong. She shook her head in reply to his look of confusion and appeal.

'She is just the apple of Margaret's eye,' she said.

'And I am—no one,' said Lewis.

'You must not say that; but you are not a great man. And Margaret thinks there is nobody good enough for her. I would not mind so much myself; you are young, and have a kind, kind heart. But you have said nothing to *her*?'

'What do you take me for?' said Lewis, with gentle indignation. Only a few words had been said, and his former attitude towards Miss Jean had not been one that would have seemed to make his present confidences natural: but the fact was that he had utter confidence in her, and she a soft, half maternal compassion and sympathy for him which had ranged her on his side in a moment. They were born to understand each other. All that was confusing and embarrassing had blown away from the thoughts of both. They sat together and talked for some minutes longer, forgetting everything else in this entrancing subject; then she sent him away, bidding God bless him, to the more important interview which awaited him. Miss Jean dried her eyes, in which tears of sympathy and emotion were standing, as she closed the door upon him. It was a thing to stir the heart in her

bosom. The first lover of Lilias! To think that little thing newly out of the nursery, who had been a baby but the other day, should have entered already upon this other stage of existence! Miss Jean sat down in her window again and mused over it with a tremor of profound sympathetic feeling in her heart. Bless the darling! that she should have come to this already. But then, what would Margaret say? He was not an earl nor a duke, but a simple gentleman. Even when you came to that, nobody knew what Murrays he was of; was there any hope that Margaret would yield her child to such a one? Miss Jean shook her head all alone as she sat and mused; her heart was sore for him, poor young man! but she did not think there was any hope.

As for Lewis, he walked to the library, in which Miss Margaret awaited him, with a sort of solemnity as men march to hear their sentence from the court-martial that has been sitting upon them. He had not much more hope than Miss Jean had, but he had less submission. He found Margaret seated in a high-backed chair of the same order as that which she used in the drawing-room—a commanding figure.

She had no knitting nor other familiar occupation to take off the edge of her dignity, but sat expecting him, her hands folded upon her lap. She did not rise when he came in, but gave him her hand with friendly stateliness.

'Simon tells me you were wanting to speak to me, Mr. Murray. It is most likely our old man has made a mistake, and you were only coming to say good-bye.'

'He has made no mistake,' Lewis said; 'there is something I wanted to say to you, to ask you. It is of the greatest importance to me, and, if I could hope that you would give me a favourable answer, it would be of importance to you too.'

'Indeed!' she said, with a smile, in which there was some haughtiness and a shade of derision. 'I cannot think of any question in which our interests could meet.'

'But there is one,' cried Lewis, anxiously. 'And you will hear me—you will hear me, at least? Miss Murray, I once said something to you—I was confused and did not know—but I said something——'

'Not confused at all,' said Miss Margaret. 'You made your meaning very clear, though it

was a very strange meaning to me. It was in relation to my sister Jean.'

The young man bowed his head. He was confused now, if he had not been so then. All that Miss Jean's gentle courtesy had smoothed over for him he saw now in Margaret's smile.

'I hope,' she said, pointedly, and with the derision more apparent than ever, 'that the answer you got then was of a satisfying kind.'

'I got no answer,' said Lewis, with a little agitation. 'Your sister is as kind as heaven; she would not let me put myself in the wrong. The feeling I had was not fictitious; I would explain it to you if I dared. She forgave me my presumption, and she stopped me. Miss Murray, it is a different thing I have come to speak to you of to-day.'

'I am glad of that,' said Miss Margaret—'very glad of that; for I may say, since you have thought better of it, that it was not a subject that was pleasing to me.'

Lewis rose up in his excitement; the little taunt in her tone, the sternness behind her smile, the watchful way in which her eyes held him, all made him feel the desperate character of the attempt he was making, and desperation took away every restraint.

'It is very different,' he said—'it is love. I did not intend it—I had never thought of it—my mind was turned another way—but I saw her by chance, and what else—what else was possible? Oh! it is very different. Love is not like anything else. It forces to speak, it makes you bold, it is more strong than I——'

'You are eloquent,' said Miss Margaret. 'Mr. Murray, that was very well put. And who are you in love with that can concern us of the house of Murkley, if I may ask the question? I will hope,' she said, with a laugh, 'that it's not me you have chosen as the object of your affection this time.'

He looked at her with a pained look, reproachful and wistful. It did him more good than if he had spoken volumes. A little quick colour, like a reflection of some passing light, gleamed over Miss Margaret's face.

'Mr. Murray,' she said, 'if that is your name, which you say yourself is not your name—who are you, a stranger, to come like this to ladies of a well-known family? I am not asking who is your object now. If I seemed to jeer at you, I ask your pardon. I will say all I can—I will say that I believe you mean no harm, but rather

to be honourable, according to what you think right. But I must tell you, you are not, so far as I know, in the position of one with whom we could make alliances. It is kindest to speak it plain out. It is just chance that has thrown us in your way, and you take impressions far too seriously,' she added, not without kindness. 'There was my sister Jean, you know; and now it is another. This will blow over too, if you will just wait a little, and consider what is befitting.'

She rose up from her high chair. She was more imposing seated in it than standing, for her stature was not great. Lewis knew that this was intended to give him his dismissal, but he was too much in earnest to take it so easily.

'Let me speak one word,' he said. 'If I am not great, there is at least one thing—I am rich. What she wishes to do, I could do it. It should all be as if there had been no disinheriting. To me the family would be as great an interest, as great a desire, as to her. Her palace of dreams, it should be real. I would devote myself to it —it should be a dream no longer. Listen to me, I could do it——'

'What you say is without meaning to me, Mr.

Murray,' Miss Margaret said, with stern paleness. 'It is better that no more should be said.'

'Without any reference, without any appeal? how do you know,' he said, 'that she might not herself think otherwise—that she might not, if only for the sake of her dream——'

'A gentleman,' said Miss Margaret, 'will never force his plea upon ladies when he sees it is not welcome. I will just bid you farewell, Mr. Murray. We shall very likely not meet again.'

She held out her hand, but he did not take it. He looked anxiously in her face.

'Can I say nothing that will move you?' he said.

'I am thinking not, Mr. Murray. When two persons disagree so much as we do upon a business so important, it is best to wish one another good-bye. And it is lucky, as you will have heard, that we are going away. I am offering you my hand, though you do not seem to see it. I would not do that, if I thought ill of you. Fare-you-well, and I wish you every prosperity,' Miss Margaret said.

He took her hand, and gave it one angry pressure. It was what he had expected, but it hurt him more than he thought. The disap-

pointment, the sadness of leaving, the blank wall that seemed to rise before him, made Lewis sad, and made him wroth. It did not seem to him that he deserved so badly of Fate. He said 'good-bye' almost in a sullen tone. But when he reached the door he turned round and looked at her, standing where he had left her, watching his departure.

'I must warn you. I do not accept this as final,' he said.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

LONDON: PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE